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CESARINE DIETRICH.

BY

GEORGE SAND.

Mme. Dudevant.

TRANSLATED BY EDWARD STANWOOD.

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CESARINE DIETRICH.

BY MADAME GEORGE SAND.

I.

I WAS thirty-five; Cesarine Dietrich was fifteen, and had just lost her mother, when I resigned myself to becoming her instructor and governess.

As it is not my own story which I am going to relate, I will not waste time in stating how much reluctance I had to overcome, being of gentle birth, and destined in my early years to a life of ease, before persuading myself to enter the family of a commoner who had made a fortune in trade. A very few words will suffice to tell my situation, and the motive which determined me thus to sacrifice my liberty.

A daughter of the Count de Nermont, and left an orphan with my young sister, I was robbed by a pretended friend of my father. He had been charged with the duty of investing our money advantageously, and he fraudulently caused it to disappear. We were ruined. There hardly remained to us enough to procure the necessaries of life; but I did not repine. I was plain, and no one made love to me. I must no longer dream of marriage. But my sister was pretty: she was sought and married by Dr. Gilbert, an able physician, by whom she had one son, my much-loved godson, Paul Gilbert. My name is Pauline.

My brother-in-law and my poor sister died young, — a few years intervening between their deaths, — leaving but very little to the dear child who was then at school. I foresaw that every thing would be eaten up by the expense of his education, and that his entrance into society would be impeded by poverty. Then it was that I determined upon the plan of increasing my own feeble resources by paid labor. In my lonely and meditative life, I had acquired sufficient learning for the task I was to undertake. Some friends of my family, who still remained devoted to me, busied themselves on my behalf. They made a bargain for me with the Dietrich family, into which I entered on terms very honorable to myself.

I hasten to say that I had no occasion to regret my decision. I found among these Germans resident at Paris a cordial hospitality and entire good-breeding. There were two brothers in partnership, Hermann and Karl. Their fortune was already reckoned by millions, and their honor had never been once suspected. An elder sister resided with them, and performed the

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duty of housekeeper with precision, animation, and gentleness: in all other respects she was a nullity; but she entertained politely and discreetly, saying little, but doing much, and always with a view to the comfort of her guests.

The elder M. Dietrich, the father of Cesarine, was an active, energetic, clever, and self-willed man. His irreproachable honesty and his success in business had given him a little pride and a certain reserve in his intercourse with other men. He desired rather to be esteemed and respected than loved; but for his daughter and for myself he always manifested only perfect and indeed delicate and courteous kindness and consideration.

I was, then, as happy as possible in my new condition. I was appreciated, and had no occasion to be anxious about the future of my godson.

The Dietrich mansion was one of the most beautiful in new Paris. It was in the neighborhood of the Bois de Boulogne, and was moreover well situated by reason of its freedom from the noise of passing vehicles. In the midst of a community excessively fond of luxury and excitement, here were shade, solitude, and comparative quiet, behind the railings and the clumps of verdure of our little park. It was not the country, certainly; but it was, as it were, a mysterious boudoir, separated from the noisy world by a screen of flowers and leaves.

The late Madame Dietrich had loved society, she had many friends, and gave good dinners. Her balls were still the topic of the servants when I entered the family. At present the house was still in mourning; and there was no reason to suppose that M. Dietrich would ever again resume the brilliant mode of life which his wife had led. He had very different tastes, and desired, for society, only a few of his friends and connections. So the great halls were closed; and he, while showing me through the darkened house, said, "This is not worth the notice of a woman of taste and good sense like yourself. It is brilliant, but nothing more. My poor dear wife used to like to show that we were rich. I never wished to deprive her of her pleasures, but I only associated with them out of complaisance. I want my daughter to have, like myself, modest tastes; then I might find quiet at home, — though that is a poor compensation indeed for the misfortune of being alone.

"You will not be alone," said I. "Your daughter will become your friend. I feel sure that she is so to some extent already."

"Not yet," he replied. "My poor child is too much absorbed in her own grief to think much of mine. Let us hope that she will do so, sooner or later."

It was a sort of unintended reproach upon Cesarine; but I did not reply to it, not yet knowing any thing of the character and sentiments of the young girl. I wished to judge her for myself, and I did not want to meet her with any thing like prejudice. We had already been introduced to each other. She was exceedingly pretty, and even handsome; for, if she had still the immature form of girlhood, she nevertheless possessed elegance and grace. Her features were clear-cut and regular. Her sadness and grief gave to her countenance something touching and austere, so that at the first sight I felt myself compelled to respect as much as to pity her. When I was alone with her for the first time, I thought it fit that

I should establish an understanding with her, and with the gravity which the occasion required.

"I do not pretend," said I, "to replace, even in a measure, the mother you mourn. I cannot even offer my devotion as something which should appear desirable to you. I have been told that I should be useful to you, and I shall try to be so. You may be sure, that, if there is any mistake about that, I shall be the first to discover it; and all I ask of you is, that you will not believe me to be actuated by a personal interest in continuing our relations if they are not very sensibly profitable to you."

She looked fixedly at me, as though she did not understand fully; and I was going to explain my resolution, when she placed her little hand upon mine, and said, "I understand very well; and, if I am astonished, it is not because you are so proud and dignified. They told me that you were so, and I believed it. But I thought that you were affectionate; and I expected, that, before any thing else, you would promise to love me."

"Can one promise affection where it has not been asked?"

"That is to say, I ought to have asked it first. Well, I request your love. Will you grant it me?"

If her face had answered to her words, I should have kissed the dear child at once. But I was too much on my guard for that; and I thought I read in her eyes that she was examining me and drawing me out, as much as I on my side was testing and observing her.

"You cannot desire my friendship," I said, "before knowing whether I deserve yours. We only know each other yet by the good things we have been told about each other. Let us wait and get acquainted. I am resolved to love you dearly, if you are what you appear to be."

"And what do I appear to be?" she asked, looking at me with a little air of suspicion. "I am sad, and only sad. You can't judge me."

"Your sorrow does you honor, and makes you more lovely. It is the grief you have in your soul and in your eyes which attracts me towards you."

"Then you want to be able to love me? I will try to appear amiable. I need some one to love me, of course. I was accustomed to affection. My poor mother adored me and indulged me. My father loves me dearly too, but he will not indulge me; and yet I am at that age when, if one is not indulged, it is very hard to believe that one is loved truly. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, indeed; and I am resolved to indulge you."

"Out of pity, I suppose."

"By the necessity of my nature. I do not love by halves; and I am unhappy when I cannot give a little happiness to those about me. But when I think I see that they misuse that happiness, I escape from them that I may not injure them."

"That is to say, you think it dangerous to love people too much. You agree with papa, then, who imagines the strangest things about me. He says that we are put into the world to struggle, and consequently to suffer, and that it is wrong to make children too happy. He declares that obstacles and privations are necessary to them to break them into the business of life. These are the words of my dear papa: I know them by heart. I do not rebel, because I love and respect him: but I am not persuaded; and when one

is sweet and tender with me, I am responsive and happy, consequently better. You will see. As you don't want to promise any thing, let us wait. You shall study me; and you will soon see that the method of poor dear mamma was right, the only good method with me."

"Can I ask you? — But no. Your beautiful eyes are filling with tears, and make me want to weep with you, and so to love you too much and too soon."

She threw her arms around my neck and sobbed. I was conquered. She said nothing: she could not speak. But there was so much frankness and confidence in her weeping on my shoulder. She seemed, notwithstanding the firmness of her features, so much like a poor wounded being demanding protection, that I began to adore her on this very first day of our acquaintance, without stopping to inquire whether she was not going to rule over me, instead of submitting to my influence. This fear only came to me later; for during these first few weeks her temper was as sweet as an angel's, and her tenderness was absolutely irresistible. It is true that I did not require much of her: she was in such deep sorrow that her health forbade; and, besides, I found her possessed of so much intelligence, that I did not believe it to be necessary to hasten her studies.

II.

WE lived very quietly in this little palace, now become too large. All the visits of condolence had been received; and, with the exception of a few old friends, no visitors were now admitted; it was M. Dietrich's wish. Deeply affected by the loss of his wife, he longed for spring, now near at hand, when he was to withdraw for the whole summer, to the country, into a retirement still more profound. He quitted business: he would have done so long before, but for the expensive tastes of his wife. He found himself rich enough, — too rich, he said. He had determined to devote himself to agriculture, and to oversee his own country estate. He even had an idea of selling or letting his city residence; and then, for the first time, I noticed the symptoms of disagreement between himself and his daughter. She loved the country as well as Paris, she said; but she also loved Paris as well as the country: and she could not look with pleasure upon the determination of her father to live altogether away from the city. She had very urgent reasons for her opinion; which also appeared very just reasons, and which she expressed with a skill which I should not have expected from one of her age. M. Dietrich, who was proud of her intelligence, allowed her, and even encouraged her, to discuss the matter with him, in order to have the pleasure of replying to her; for he was self-willed, as I have said, and did not believe that any one could ever hold an argument against him. When discussion was exhausted, and he thought he had answered her completely, taking her silence for a confession of defeat, he noticed that she was weeping. Those great tears which fell upon her hand, without her appearing to feel them, troubled him strangely; and I saw upon his handsome but austere features an expression of mingled sympathy and uneasiness.

"Why do you weep?" he asked, after trying for a few minutes to seem as though he had not noticed her mute

reproach. "Come, tell me: I don't like you to be sulky. It offends and troubles me."

"I will tell you, dear papa," said Cesarine, going to him and kissing him, — a caress of which he seemed to me to be more susceptible because he tried to appear not. "Yes, I will tell you; for you would never guess. My mother loved this house: she chose it, arranged it, and ornamented it herself. You did not always agree with her; and you had a different idea of the beautiful. I do not yet know what I think on these points. I don't know whether our manner of living is in good or bad taste. But I see mamma again in every thing here; and I love what she loved, just because she loved it. You are so good, that you would never oppose her. You said, 'After all, it is your house.' Well, I say, it is mamma's house. I am willing to go into the country, which she did not like. I shall like it, dear papa, because I shall be with you; but at the idea of never returning here, or of seeing strangers at home in mother's house when I return, I weep. You see it, — I weep in spite of myself. I cannot help it."

"Well, well," said M. Dietrich, rising, "dry your eyes. The house shall be neither sold nor let. He went out a little abruptly, making a motion to me which I did not exactly understand, but which I thought might mean that he wished me to join him in the garden; and I went.

"You see, my dear Mlle. de Nermont," said he, taking my hand, "this poor child is going to be just like her mother. She will enter into none of my views, she will partake of none of my tastes. My arguments, however wise, will go in at one ear and out at the other."

"I cannot believe it," I replied. "She is too intelligent."

"Her mother was intelligent too. Do not suppose that she disappointed me by any lack of spirit. She knew very well that she was wrong in her ideas; she said as much, and was altogether good and charming; but she yielded to the madness of the age. She had a fever of love for the world; and whenever she had made to me the sacrifice of some whim, she suffered and wept as Cesarine suffers and weeps at this moment. I know how to resist no matter what man, my equal in force and skill, but how resist feeble beings, — women and children?"

I remonstrated with him, that the attachment of Cesarine for "her mother's house" was not a vain fancy, and that she had given good reasons for it.

"If her motives are really sincere," replied he, "and you see that I do not wish to doubt it, that is the more reason why she should make to me the sacrifice of submitting to the slight disappointment I impose."

"You are then actually persuaded, Monsieur Dietrich, that youth should be systematically habituated to endurance, or at least to disappointment?"

"Isn't that your opinion also?" he cried, with an energy of conviction which hardly admitted of reply.

"Permit me," said I, "to say that I was 'spoiled' in my youth like others. I did not pass through what is called the School of Misfortune, until I was at the age when one is in possession of his full strength and faculties. I thank God that it was so; for I do not know how I should have endured misfortune if it had come to me before I was armed to defend myself against it."

"Then," said he, pursuing his idea without noticing objections, "you have improved since you were called upon to endure. You were previously only a soul without self-consciousness. I remember my own childhood. I was nothing until I was compelled to fight and struggle, at my own risk and peril."

"The force of circumstances brings about that fight and struggle in some form for all who enter the world. Society is hard to attack, terrible sometimes. Do you believe, therefore, that it is wise to invent disappointment for children? Do they not meet it from infancy? If life brings happiness only in the days of ignorance and heedlessness, don't you think it cruel to shorten that little space, under the pretext that it cannot last?"

"There you reason like my wife. Alas! all women reason alike. They have for weakness not only regard and pity, but a sort of respect and sympathy. It is very wrong, Mlle. de Nermont, very unfortunate, I assure you."

"If you blame me for my opinions, my dear M. Dietrich, I am very sorry not to have known yours better before I entered your family; but" —

"But you are ready to leave me if I do not think like yourself? There is the woman again with her submission, which is in itself tyranny! You know well that you would inflict a serious injury upon me, by renouncing a task which it was so difficult to induce you to accept. You know just as well that I will not try to supersede you, so evident is it to me that you are to be the guardian angel of my daughter. Her aunt cannot be her instructor, — she is too ignorant: besides, she has the defects of her sex. She loves the world" —

"She doesn't seem to do so."

"Her appearance deceives you. She has also, I admit, in an eminent degree, the virtues of her sex. She is laborious, economical, orderly, and ingenious in the duties of hospitality. Do not think that I do her injustice, for indeed I admire and respect her highly; but I tell you she loves the world, as every woman, however serious she may be, loves the flattery of her self-love. My poor sister Helmina is neither young nor pretty, nor brilliant in conversation. She receives guests politely, and gives the directions for a dinner admirably. She knows it, and is frequently complimented on her accomplishments; and the more her skill in these matters is recognized, the prouder does she become, and the more consoled for her nullity in every other respect."

"You are a severe observer, M. Dietrich; and I am afraid that my turn to be judged by your Spartan impartiality will soon come. I fear it, I confess; for I am far from feeling perfect."

"You are relatively perfect: my judgment has been formed already. You will indulge Cesarine so much the more. It will not be from selfishness, like the others, who regret past pleasures, and hope to see them renewed with her as mistress in the house. It will be from goodness, from devotion, from tenderness towards her; for she already has such irresistible attractions" —

"To which you are the first to yield!"

"Yes; but I do not wish to do so. Don't allow yourself to be ruled by her; that is what I ask of you. Make this effort in her interest, promise me."

"Certainly, I promise you, if I see that she abuses my good nature by requiring what would be harmful. But that has not happened yet; and I must not torment myself about a contingency which is not to be anticipated."

"You count for nothing, then, her opposition to my desire to sell the house?"

"Ought I to persuade her to submit to your wishes in this matter?"

"Yes: I beg you to do so."

"Shall I dare to tell you that your plan seems to me cruel?"

"No, it is not; for I will not sell it. I wish to have it conceded that I may sell it, so as to teach Cesarine to yield with good grace. Be sure, that, if parents do not teach children to renounce what they have set their hearts upon, they will never learn it of themselves. The happiness which one pretends to give them only makes them unhappy for the rest of their lives."

Perhaps he was right. I did not dare to insist; and I went to rejoin my charge with the intention of doing what I had been requested, but I found her smiling. "Spare yourself the pain of persuading me," she broke out. "I heard accidentally all that papa said, and all that you replied. I did not lose a word. There is no harm done. You are two good angels for me, — papa an austere angel, who wishes me happiness by all means; you an angel of sweetness, who wish me the same thing by the natural means. You felt that you must adopt his method, but that it might lead me to hypocrisy. What would he think, if, after having seen me submissive, he should discover that I had not taken his threats seriously? Truly, if am to be spoiled, as they say, that is to be corrupted morally, it will be by him. He will teach me the habit of pretending submission, and nevertheless of imposing upon him, without his suspecting it, the sacrifice of his own will. God be thanked! I am better than he thinks. I will yield every thing out of love for him. I will follow your instructions. I will make you very happy, only" —

"Only what, my darling?"

"Nothing," she replied, kissing my hand; but her beautiful glance, at once tender and self-willed, finished her sentence better than words: I will make you very happy, only you must do all that I desire.

She understood herself well, this energetic, obstinate, and powerful young girl. She united in herself her mother's suppleness and her father's strength of purpose. In the words of the old family doctor, whom I consulted about the best mode of treating her, she had a double character, with all the patience of a shrewd woman for compassing her ends, and all the energy of a man of action for overturning obstacles and clearing away resisting objects. In that case, thought I, why should her father torment himself on her account? He wishes her to be strong: she is invincible. He seeks to harden her: she is a fire which hardens others. He offers to teach her to bear defeat, as though she were not destined to conquer! Do those who know how to overcome need endurance?

III.

SHE almost alarmed me by her power. I determined to study her well before revolving like a satellite about this star. It was necessary to know if she was as good as she was amiable; if she would use her power for evil or for good.

It was not easy to make up my mind on this point; and to its consideration I devoted more than a year. One day in the country, I was startled by the cries of a little bird which she kept in a

cage, and which had nothing to eat. As it disturbed our music-lesson, and as, moreover, I could not bear to see it suffer, I arose to give it food. Cesarine appeared not to notice the action; but, after the lesson, carried the cage away to her room, and I very soon heard again the bird's cries of distress. I asked her why, since the poor little creature knew how to eat, she did not leave its food where it could reach it. "For a very simple reason," she said. "If it could get along without me, it would care no more for me."

"But if you should forget it?"

"I shall not forget it."

"Then you condemn it intentionally to the punishment of waiting and to the tortures of hunger; for it cries unceasingly."

"I do it intentionally: I am going to try papa's method with it."

"Not so: it is wicked trifling. The method is not applicable to unreasoning beings. Say, rather, that you love the bird with a selfish and cruel love. Little does it matter to you that the little fellow is suffering, provided it is attached to you. Take care not to treat creatures of your own kind in such a manner."

"In that case," said she, laughing, "my method differs from that of papa, since it applies only to beings not gifted with reason."

I tried to prove to her that it is our duty to render happy the creatures placed in our care, even the lowest and most feeble.

"What is happiness to a creature which thinks only of eating?" she replied with a pretty shrug of her shoulders.

"To eat. Infants at the breast have no other emotion. Should they be made to feel the pangs of hunger to make them attached to their nurse?"

"My father apparently thinks so."

"He does not think so, nor do you. Why this constant teasing about your absent father? Let us admit that his method may not be unquestioned" —

"There, that's what I wanted you to say."

"And it was for that you tortured your little bird?"

"No: I didn't think of such a thing. I wished to render myself, myself exclusively, necessary to its existence: but it is taking too much pains for such a silly creature; and, as it has wings, I will give it its liberty."

"Stop a moment! Tell me your whole idea. In giving it liberty, do you make a sacrifice?"

"Ah! you wish to *dissect* me, my good friend?"

"I only ask," I said, "that you may examine yourself."

"I know myself now."

"I do not believe it."

"You think it impossible at my age? Have you not forced me to it by your constant questions? This curiosity of yours about me forces me to examine myself from morning until night. It will mature me too quickly, I warn you. You will do better not to enwrap me so much in my own consciousness, and to let me live as I prefer. I shall become so metaphysical under your argumentation, that I shall no longer enjoy any thing. Ah! mamma knew me better. When I asked her any thing abstruse she answered, 'You have no need to know;' and, if she saw me thinking too much, she spoke of pretty dolls' dresses or of my own. She wanted me to be a woman, — nothing more, nothing better. Papa wants me to think like a man, and you dream of raising me to the estate of an angel. Happily I know how to defend my-

self, and to make you love me as you do."

"It is true: I love you, and I want you, as you say, to be perfect. You can be."

"If I wish to be, perhaps. But I don't know whether I do or not. I will think about it."

So I never had the last word with her, and I must every time begin again the process of probing her soul. Occasions were rare; for on the surface, and in the ordinary affairs of life, she possessed a wonderfully, I might almost say an incredibly, even temper, considering her age and position. Never did I have occasion to reprove her for a moment of listlessness, or for the least semblance of resistance to my wishes about her studies. She was always ready, always attentive. In understanding, memory, power of reasoning and penetration, she was very precocious. She seemed to me to be devoid of enthusiasm and sensitiveness; but she was gifted with a rare critical faculty, an extreme impatience of any thing evil, and so high an instinctive sense of honor, that she seemed incapable of understanding that heroism appears difficult, and merits great rewards. I hardly dared to bespeak her admiration for great characters and grand actions. Her face seemed to say, What do you think so astonishing in that? Would you not be impelled to deeds so natural? or is it that you deem me inferior to the lofty characters which fill you with such admiration?

How hope to govern, or even to modify, such a person? I had fought against myself in my life of reverses and sorrows: I had never been compelled to contend with others. What consoled me in my powerlessness was, that M. Dietrich, with all the energy acquired in his life of work and worry, had no better comprehension than myself of the character of his daughter. To this day I cannot say whether the inconsistencies of her ideas about herself were due to her own indecision, or to an impulse to take the opposite side from that to which one would persuade her. That marvellous power of reasoning which showed itself in her studies disappeared wholly from her character in its application to her daily life. She had tastes which contradicted each other without her seeming to know it or to be astonished at the phenomenon.

"I wish to make my plans," she would say, "so as to live on good terms with the extremes which I carry about in myself. I love both light and shade, silence and noise. It seems to me that one is happy when one can reconcile contrasts in her nature."

"Yes," I replied: "it is possible to do so in certain cases; but there is the great, the eternal contrast between good and evil, which never find a lodgement in the same soul, without one stifling the other."

"I will answer that when I know what it means. You must permit me, at my age, not to know what evil is."

And she laid her plans so as not to appear to know. If I surprised in her a freak of egotism and cruelty, like that developed in the story of the bird, her face expressed honest astonishment. "I had not thought of that," she would say; but never would she confess that she had done wrong, and was resolved to do so no more. She promised to think about it, to examine the question, and to form an opinion. She thought no one had a right to ask more of her, and protested with great fluency against "imposed convictions."

We remained eight months in the country in a very paradise, and in a seclusion interrupted only by a few visits of ceremony. M. Dietrich devoted himself to his new passion for agriculture, and by and by we saw little of him except at the table. Mlle. Helmina Dietrich was absorbed in her housekeeping cares. Cesarine was thus compelled to live with two old women, — the one very gay (Mlle. Helmina loved to be teased by her niece, who treated her as she would a child), but with no influence upon her; the other serious enough, but irresolute and disquieted. I confess that I dared to do nothing, fearing to irritate unwittingly a self-love which opposition would have exasperated.

We returned to Paris in the middle of winter. Cesarine, who had not exhibited the least sign of impatience at so long a stay in the country, did not give way to her joy at returning to Paris, her much-loved home, and her old acquaintances. But I had sufficient reason to believe that her father was right when he said that she loved the world. Her health, which had not been very good since her mother died, began to revive rapidly. This improvement made her in a short time so beautiful and so fascinating in appearance and manner, that at sixteen she had every attraction of a grown woman. Her understanding made progress with equal rapidity. I noticed how steadily it matured. What she did not learn, she divined by a sort of instinct: art and literature opened to her their pages as if by magic. Her taste became pure. The paradoxes in her nature disappeared. At the end of my year of trial of her, I sought M. Dietrich, and announced my decision.

"I shall remain. I am not necessary to your daughter: no one is necessary to her, or can ever be so; for she is too far above those she will meet. Nevertheless, I can be useful to her, by assisting her in giving play to her good instincts. If it should happen that these instincts lead her astray, I cannot destroy them, and no more can you: but we may together do something to retard their development or to weaken their effect. She tells me so, at least; and she has taken a liking for me, and has begged me earnestly not to leave her. As for myself, I can say that she deserves my attachment to her, even were it necessary sometimes to suffer something through my devotion to her."

M. Dietrich expressed himself highly gratified, and I became more than before a member of the family. I gave up my apartments, which I had held until this time, and brought my modest furniture and family relics, my books and piano, to the Dietrich mansion, where I consented to occupy a very pretty room which I had hitherto discreetly refused to take. It was the chamber of Mlle. Helmina, who now removed to that of her late sister-in-law, and thus occupied an apartment adjoining Cesarine's..

From this time I lived in greater independence than I could have hoped. I could receive my friends without their passing in review before the Dietriches. Their number, to be sure, was limited; but I could see my dear nephew without restraint, and spare him the too critical judgment which Cesarine would probably pass upon the awkward college-boy.

Happily he did not deserve such criticism. It was a great pleasure to me to see the dear boy well grown and in good health. He was not handsome, but he was interesting; and he

resembled my poor sister, — fine dark eyes, tender but penetrating; a mouth delicate and firm; an attractive paleness in his countenance, but not such as is induced by illness; fine, wavy hair, shading a broad and noble brow. He was not to be tall, but he was well formed; and all his movements were graceful, and his voice was charmingly sweet.

He had just finished his studies, and had received his bachelor's diploma. I was very anxious about the career which he ought to follow. M. Dietrich, to whom I had spoken of him, said, "Don't trouble yourself: I will take charge of him. Introduce me to him, and I will find out for what his character and his temperament fit him." But when I wished to present Paul to him, the latter replied, "Not yet, dear aunt, not yet. I did not wish to get through with my studies before deciding about my future. One of my intimate friends is the son of a rich publisher, who has proposed that I enter with him into his father's store as a clerk. At first we shall be paid only board and lodging; but, little by little, we shall get salaries that will increase as time goes on. You know I have an income of six hundred francs. That will be enough to clothe me properly, and enable me to go sometimes to the opera and the theatre. I am very well pleased with my prospects; and, as I have the promise of the place from M. Latour, I ought not to break my agreement."

"But it seems to me," said I, "that, before engaging yourself thus, you should have consulted me."

"Time pressed," he replied; "and I was sure that you would approve. It was decided last night."

"I am not so sure that I do approve. I don't know whether you have taken the right course or not; and I should like to have consulted M. Dietrich."

"My dear aunt, I do not wish to have a patron. I do not wish to be under obligations to any one before knowing whether I can esteem the man who is to render me a service. You see I am as proud as you could desire. I have thought much about this matter for the past year. It is necessary, I say to myself, that I should decide quickly; and I have no right to dream of a brilliant destiny which will probably not be realized. I vowed to embrace the first honorable career which offered. I have done so. It is not brilliant, and perhaps, thanks to the good wishes of M. Dietrich, not such as you dreamed of for me. It may be that M. Dietrich might have enabled me, by securing me special favor, to leap over some of the steps in my apprenticeship. I don't desire that; and I will not belong to a benefactor, whoever he may be. M. Latour gives me a place because he believes me to be a steady, hard-working young man. He does me, and he shall do me, no other favor. My future is in my own hands, not in his. He has given me no word of sympathy; he has made me no promise of protection. He is a very cold, matter-of-fact man; and he is therefore the man whom I need over me. I shall learn the business with him; and at the same time I shall continue my education. His store is a library, — an always open cyclopædia, — my place of work during the day, my study during my hours of freedom. He has told me that I shall have to read proofs; but I know that he will let me read what I please in my room. That is all the pleasure and all the liberty I want."

Of course I had to be satisfied

with his arrangements. Paul had not yet come to the passionate age. In the full enthusiasm of a boy, he thought he could always be happy with study, and never have any other desire.

M. Dietrich, to whom I recounted our interview, concealing nothing, told me that he augured well of a character of such a stamp, even from the absence of the spirit of heroism in which most young people indulge. He said that it was necessary for every one to try his own wings, and obtain the measure of his powers, and promised that he would interest himself on behalf of my godson whenever I desired it.

I ought to have been satisfied, and I pretended to be so; but the precocious independence of Paul made me a little anxious. I had sad thoughts about the spirit of self-reliance which is spreading among youth more and more. I saw, on the one hand, Cesarine laying her plans to govern everybody; and, on the other hand, Paul coming to a determination, with a perhaps unthinking self-confidence, to be directed by no one. That my pupil, spoiled by fortune, should believe that every thing was created for her was inevitable, — due to her position; but that my godson, struggling with the unknown, should declare that he would carve out his own place, alone and unaided, seemed to me dangerously Quixotic; and I waited for his first check in life as an occasion to lead him to myself as his natural guide.

IV.

LITTLE by little, through the influence of Cesarine, exerted shrewdly and without interruption, aided by the secret desire of her Aunt Helmina, the relations of the family with society, formed by her mother, were resumed. Exchanges of calls became more frequent. People who had not been seen during the last year were adroitly brought back. Some invitations from the most intimate friends were accepted; and, before the year of mourning had expired, there was talk of returning the courtesies extended, by re-opening the smaller halls, and giving modest dinners to the nearest friends. It was concerted and brought about by the aunt and the niece with so much adroitness, that M. Dietrich only began to suspect after the first victory had been achieved. He was led to believe that the party had been unexpectedly more numerous than had been intended. A second dinner was followed by a little evening party, where there was a little sacred music, — by chance, of course, — at the request of the aunt, who had seen signs of weariness spreading among the guests, and who thought that she ought to adopt some means for entertaining them.

The next week sacred music gave place to secular. The young people of both sexes joined in a little singing. Cesarine had no voice; but she accompanied well. She was indeed a more thorough musician than most of those who pretended to be wrapped up in music, whom she inwardly laughed at, with a mixture of pity and contempt.

Two months later, a heedless young girl begun, without thought, at one of these gatherings, to play a seductive waltz. The other young people arranged themselves for a dance. Cesarine did not wish to dance, nor to make others do so; but the waltz went on, nevertheless, to the great delight

of Helmina, and to the astonishment of the servants. When the guests separated, it was with the idea of having a ball before the winter closed.

M. Dietrich was away. He was in the habit of going frequently to his Mireval estate. He was expected the next day. Fate would have it, that, recalled by a business letter, he arrived at seven o'clock in the morning of the day succeeding the *soirée*. We had retired late; the servants were still asleep; and the house was in disorder. M. Dietrich, who had preserved the simple habits of youth, awoke no one; but, after going to his room, he wondered what was the cause of the tardy appearance of the domestics, and went into the little drawing-room where the dancing began. There had been left little traces which led him into the larger hall, where the dance had ended. Having taken a hasty glance, which showed him what had been taking place, in a fit of indignation and displeasure he came to my door, and listened to see if I had arisen. I had. I recognized his step, and went out into the entry expecting reproaches from him.

He did not dare to make them to me. "I see," said he, restraining his anger, "that you have not participated in the follies which you could not repress."

"I beg pardon," I replied: "I had no desire for amusement; but I did not for a moment quit Cesarine, and I was the last to retire. You find me up already because I have not slept. I have been anxious in the thought that it was intended to conceal this little party from you, and in reflecting whether I ought to remain silent, or assume the humiliating office of tale-bearer. We were, M. Dietrich, in circumstances which I could not have foreseen, and in a struggle with obligations which have never been defined between us. What must I do in the future? I do not believe that I am able to control Cesarine by an exercise of authority; and I will not assume the disagreeable part of repressing all social pleasures. The *rôle* of spy is still more repugnant to my tastes; and I beg you not to try to impose it on me."

"I see nothing out of the way in your view of duty. You can't prevent any thing, I know; and you will not be a traitor, that I know. But you can use your influence to turn Cesarine from her wayward impulses. Can't you find something to say to her to make her reflect? or has she already openly resisted you?"

I explained that Cesarine had not been instrumental in causing the guests to begin the dance; but she had not resisted their wishes. After the festivities had commenced, she said that she was, as it were, in a dream. Every thing reminded her of her mamma. In the midst of quite a long conversation on the subject we had been interrupted; and, as the guests were departing, Cesarine had promised that the next year her friends should dance as much as they pleased in her father's house.

"Next year!" exclaimed M. Dietrich. "Why, it begins in a fortnight!"

"I had nothing to say," I replied; "and I have neither advice nor instruction to give in the matter."

"But you have an opinion: can you not tell me what you would do in my place?"

"I would engage that Cesarine should not so soon open this house, consecrated to her mother's memory for a year, to the sound of music and the display

of dress. I would make her promise that for another year there shall be no dancing here. She will promise, and she will keep her word. But I would not deprive her of the pleasure of her friends, and of the society of the most intimate of them, without which her life would be too desolate and solitary. Solitude and meditation, without relaxation, have as great dangers for her as pleasure. I should fear that the necessity of submitting too completely to isolation would rather have the effect to create in her such inward opposition, that separation from the world would of itself make her intensely worldly.

M. Dietrich did not reply, and, after a few moments of thought, he left me; but the next day he resumed the conversation.

"I have not reproached her at all," he said. "I pretended to have noticed nothing; and I had no difficulty in persuading her to promise that there shall be no dancing here for a year to come. Cesarine had already come to my opinion through her own reflection. She told me the story of the fête, gently blamed her own want of discretion, to say nothing of the frivolity of her aunt, and confessed that she had promised to tease me to re-open the house, adding that she begged me not to do so. Therefore I could only approve instead of scolding her. She anticipated me, as she always does."

"And you believe that she will always anticipate you?"

"I am sure of it," he replied dejectedly. "She is stronger than I, and she knows it. She will always find some way of putting herself in the stronger position."

"But, if she governs herself by her own best instincts, what does it matter that she does not yield to yours? The best government possible is that which is never called upon to exercise authority. Will it not be the case, that, of her own free will, she will always find herself in accord with you?"

"You think, then, that a woman can be constantly reasonable, and can consequently obtain the right to throw off every external restraint?"

"I believe that a woman can be guided by reason, because I have always been so without great effort, and consequently without deserving much credit for it. As for the freedom to which that entitles her, without being a pronounced free-thinker, I do regard that as the privilege of perfect and well-tested reason."

"And you think that at sixteen Cesarine is a marvel of wisdom and prudence, who ought to be obedient only to herself?"

"Let us hope that she will become such. Since her desire is neither to obey nor to yield to others, let us encourage her best instincts, and not break her will. Do not become harsh, M. Dietrich, until you can complain of something blamable."

"You surely do not find any thing very tranquillizing in that irresolution which she has confessed to you, — her pretended ignorance of her own tastes and desires?"

"I believe it sincere, at least."

"Take care, Mlle. de Nermont! You are charmed, fascinated. You will only increase her spirit of domination by yielding to it."

He protested in vain. He yielded to it himself, even more than I. The superiority of his daughter, revealing itself to him more and more, placed him in a strange position. She flattered his pride, but she wounded his self-love. He would have preferred to see Cesarine a queen over others, sub-

missive to himself alone. "It will be necessary," I remarked to him, "before leaving this subject, to come to a definite understanding upon one essential point. It is necessary, in order to second your views, if I share them, to know your opinion upon the worldly life which you so much dread on your daughter's behalf. Do you fear that it will be such a dissipation as to make her frivolous?"

"No: she cannot become frivolous. She is more like me than like her mother."

"She does resemble you much. And you therefore have nothing to fear for her safety."

"No: she will not abuse pleasure."

"Then what do you fear?"

He did not know what to reply, and gave several contradictory reasons. I was determined to probe his thoughts to the very bottom; for my part was likely to be difficult if M. Dietrich had not come to a definite decision. I perceived that he was undecided, that he was beginning to know it, and that he showed it in his manner. Cesarine had judged him well. She had said that he wished always to be at war, and that he would never come to terms with any one. He ended the interview by renewedly expressing his deference and attachment to me, and by begging me once again never to leave his daughter until she should be married.

"If I make that promise," I said, "I must be left free to judge for myself what is best, and to act, upon all occasions, under the inspiration of my own conscience."

"Yes, certainly: I expect it to be so," cried he, with the sigh of a man who has been relieved of a great anxiety. "I will abdicate in your favor. To train up a woman, a woman is required."

And indeed from that day there was a marked change in him. He ceased to oppose himself systematically to the impulses of his daughter. I was delighted with this result, which seemed to me altogether desirable. Shall I deceive myself? Was I not unwittingly a conspirator with Cesarine to remove the only obstacle which limited her power? Had M. Dietrich indeed hit the mark when he told me that I was charmed, fascinated, and led a captive by my pupil?

If this weakness was mine, it was a misfortune which serious disappointments caused me to expiate later. I believed sincerely that I was taking the right course, and contributing to the general good, by modifying the obstinate resistance to his daughter on the part of the father. This result, I deemed desirable in every way; for I could no longer hesitate to believe that Cesarine could only be directed by placing the government of herself in her own hands, endeavoring always to make her aware of dangers which she disregarded, or which she regarded as fictitious, and which must be removed from her, or avoided without her knowledge.

The winter passed without any further incident to change or disturb our relations. The ladies received their friends, but there were no undue festivities. Cesarine had much tact and grace, and knew how to repress the guests when the noise of their gayety threatened to come to the ears of her father, who retired early, but never, she said, slept with both eyes closed.

I must now introduce the rest of the Dietrich family. There were, then, three Misses Dietrich, daughters of M. Karl Dietrich, — a pretty trio of well-bred *parvenues*, very proud of

their wealth, and very ambitious, even to the youngest, a miss of twelve, who talked of marriage like a grown person. Her gabble was the amusement of the family; her childish freedom of opinion was the key which opened all discussions upon the brilliant future and the golden dreams of these young ladies.

The father, M. Karl Dietrich, was a portly, jovial man, the opposite of his brother, whom he worshipped as a demigod, and whom he consulted about every thing, but without confessing to him that he did not follow half his advice. He was essentially low-bred, and showed it on all occasions; but he was an honest man, had no vices, and loved his family sincerely. If his business was not the most elevating in the world, it was yet not degrading; and that is something in our day, when the source of riches is rarely considered. He also adored Cesarine, and, by a curious instinct, regarded her as the queen of the family. He did not hesitate to say, that it was not only absurd, but wicked, to oppose a being so perfect. Cesarine knew her power over him: she knew that if she, at fifteen, had been disposed to contract debts, her uncle would have trusted her with the key of his safe. She had in her closets costly dresses, and in her boxes beautiful jewels, which he had given her without his daughters' knowledge; saying that they had no taste, and that Cesarine alone could appreciate such fine things. It was true. Cesarine's taste was excellent; and her uncle felt sufficiently rewarded for his gifts when she praised them.

Madame Karl Dietrich did not fail to observe the partiality of her husband for his niece; and she pretended to approve and share it, but really it caused her pain; and it was easy to see secret jealousy through the flattery and caresses which she and her daughters lavished upon Cesarine.

There were many distant relatives of the Dietrich family, — some more German than French, others more French than German, intermarried and allied in a curious manner. All who were more or less related to the Dietriches, or to their wives, attached themselves to their fortunes, and sheltered themselves under their wings. The brothers had been generous and willing in the matter; esteeming it a duty to aid their relatives, and being able, thanks to prosperity, to do so without great inconvenience. The famous receptions and balls of Madame Hermann Dietrich had extended their connections with the wealthy greatly, and the house had influence with all the ministers in all administrations. The family constituted a clan, all the members of which were under a certain obligation to the two brothers, to Hermann particularly, and forming thus a little court, the incense of whose flattery could not fail to rise about the head of Cesarine.

I never liked society; and I was not pleased with the little parties which were quite too numerous to justify their being regarded as simply family re-unions. I did not say so, but Cesarine did not fail to perceive it. "We are too plebeian for you," she said, "and I am not surprised at it: for my own part, I find our numerous family very insipid. They have indeed tried to make distinctions among themselves, and to follow different careers; but I think my young cousin the painter as vulgar and as commercial in his instincts as my old cousin the paper-hanging manufacturer; and that my cousin who is a composer of music has no more of the sacred fire than my

John-Bull uncle who runs a cotton factory. I have heard you say that there are no longer any marked distinctions between the various elements of modern society, and that working people talk upon art and literature, as well as artists speak of industry, or of science applied to industry. It seems to me that none of my dear relatives have any ideas at all; and I seek in vain about me for something original or inspired. My mother knew better how to fill her halls. If she admitted a few of our family who now surround us, she also drew in others who added distinction and real elegance to the society. When papa allows me to return to society, without going out of his house, you shall see a collection of people better chosen and more interesting, — people who do not come to approve and applaud, but to discuss and appreciate, — true artists, *real* great ladies, travellers, poets, diplomates, politicians. When I am mistress of this great house, I shall be placed in circumstances which will require tact, attractive conversational powers, real knowledge, and solid talents, and, what I have failed to have thus far, fixed opinions. Let us work, my dear friend, — make me work. My mother contented herself with being a charming woman; but I believe that I have a more difficult rôle to play than to show off elegant diamonds, fine dresses, and beautiful shoulders. I must exhibit a noble spirit, and a character worthy of study. Let us work. My father will be pleased; and he will learn yet that the battle of life is easy to one who has been prepared for it, even without the help of struggle and privation at home."

If I have made Cesarine speak a little more clearly and consecutively than she really did, it is only with the purpose of abridging, and stating in a few words, the substance of our frequent conversations. I can assert that the *resumé* is at least faithful, and that at eighteen Cesarine had not been diverted from the purpose which is briefly set forth in her words given above.

I will therefore pass rapidly over the years which lead us to that epoch in her life. We passed all the summers at Mireval, where she worked very hard with me, rising early, and losing not an hour. Her seasons of rest from study were short, and filled with activity. She went to see her father in the field or in his library, and interested herself in his work and his researches. He was so much pleased with this, that he became her slave; and that would have been all right enough, if Cesarine had not confessed to me that agriculture did not interest her in the least, but that she wished to please her father, that is to say, to charm him, and bring him into submission.

I should have been afraid that she was playing the same trick with me, if I had not seen that she really loved study, and sought to exceed the sum of knowledge which I had been able to acquire. I soon felt that I was running the risk of being left behind her, and that I also must work on my own account, — not that I failed anywhere as an instructor; but the fire and the facility of youth were no longer mine. My task was thus beginning to absorb and to weary me, when a new phase of my pupil's character began to appear; and her intellectual enthusiasm abated on account of new pre-occupations.

V.

BEFORE entering on this new era of an existence, I ought to recollect my nephew, and to tell briefly his his-

tory during the three years which I pass over. I cannot better recapitulate his character, and describe his life, than by copying the last letter which I received from him at Mireval in the summer of 1858: —

"*My darling Godmother*, — Don't be uneasy on my account. I am always well, and have never known what it is to be sick. Don't be angry because I write so seldom. I have so little time to myself! I used to earn twelve hundred francs a year; and my salary is now two thousand, besides my board and lodging. My evenings are always free, and I read a great deal. You will, therefore, see that I am very contented and happy, and that my choice was a good one. In ten or twelve years I shall earn certainly ten or twelve thousand francs, thanks to hard work, and to certain business arrangements which I will explain to you when we meet.

"Now to the great question of your letter. You tell me that you are in good circumstances, and that you wish to *trust* to me (I suppose you mean to *give* me) your savings; so that, instead of being a clerk on a salary, I may associate myself with some one in a certain scheme for improving land. Thanks, my good aunt. You are the angel of my life; but I do not accept, and I never will accept. I know that you have made sacrifices for my education. They were great sacrifices then for you. I ought to have accepted them, and I did, because I was a child: but I hope yet to repay your expenditures; and if, instead of such a plan, I should still allow myself to be indebted to your bounty, I should blush for myself. What! a booby of twenty-one throw himself into the weak arms of a delicate, loving, hard-working woman? Don't propose it again, unless you wish to humiliate me, and wound my self-respect. Your position is more precarious than mine, poor aunty. You are dependent upon the caprice of a woman. I haven't any illusions: I have experience in life. My employer is attached to me because I bring money to his house, and don't let any go out. You are only an article of intellectual luxury, which can be dispensed with in a moment of impatience or injustice. They may even wound your feelings involuntarily in a fit of ill-humor; and that you would never endure. My future, at least, shall not be in the hands of M. Dietrich. You have been a little angry with me because I refused his protection. You didn't understand, then, my dear aunt, that I did not wish to depend upon the man upon whom you were also dependent? that I would not wish to expose you to the penalty of having to submit to some angry act of his on account of your determination not to hurt my prospects? I have replied to the invitations to family gatherings, which he has given through you, that I had not the time. But it was only because I knew that in those parties all were more or less indebted to Dietrich; and I should have carried there, in spite of myself, a certain feeling of independence which would have been sure to betray itself by some intolerable act of freedom. And you would have been responsible for my impertinence! That's another reason for my decision.

"Let things remain just as they are, — I your debtor forever. It might be easy for me to return you the money which you have expended on my account: nothing would repay your tender care, your maternal love, — nothing but my gratitude, which is as great as my heart can contain. You shall remain my mother: you shall never be

my banker. I wish that you might regain absolute liberty, without having to fear poverty; and I hope that you will not remain an hour in the house of strangers, if that hour is not passed agreeably to yourself.

"There, aunty, it is said once for all.

"The last time I saw you, you wore a dress that had been turned, and scarcely in keeping with the gorgeous surroundings of M. Dietrich's mansion. I said to myself, 'My aunt needn't so economize a few yards of silk. She isn't mean: she isn't even saving enough on her own account. Is it for me she is so economical? I will not believe it. The next money I have to spare I will use to buy her a new dress.' And I have done so. You will receive to-morrow morning a piece of goods which I think pretty, and which I know is the latest style. It will probably be criticised by the incomparable Cesarine; but I don't care for that if it pleases you. Only I warn you, that, if you turn it when it is no longer new, I shall notice it, and send you another so costly as to ruin me.

"Excuse my poor gift, and love always the rebellious child who cherishes and reveres you.

"PAUL GILBERT."

It was impossible not to be touched by his love and earnestness. Cesarine surprised me in the midst of my tears, and demanded to know the cause. I thought it useless to tell her; but as she persisted, and seemed really hurt by my refusal, I let her read Paul's letter. She read it coolly, and returned it to me without a word.

"I hope you are satisfied," said I.

She replied "Yes;" and we went on with our lesson.

When we had finished our studies, she remarked, "Your nephew is an original, but his pride pleases me. He is wrong, however, to suppose that his 'freedom' would be displeasing to me. It would come like a ray of real sunshine through the atmosphere of coarse flattery which I breathe in Paris. He thinks me stupid, I see; and when he calls me 'incomparable,' that means, of course, that he thinks me very homely."

"He has never seen you."

"Oh, yes! How do you suppose that he could come and see you during four years, and we not meet? It is of no use for you to live in a room far from mine, and ask him to come on days when I am out. I was curious to see him; and once, two years ago, my three cousins and I were on the watch for him as he crossed the garden. Then, as he passed very quickly, and did not deign to raise his eyes towards the terrace where we were seated, we watched again as he went out, standing on the grand staircase. He bowed as he passed; and, although he looked very proper and very abstracted, I am sure that he looked at us curiously."

"He looked very badly then, or he did not know which of the four was you; for last year he saw your photograph, and seemed surprised, saying that he had supposed you very small, and a brunette. He must have taken your cousin Marguerite for you."

"What did he say about my photograph?"

"Nothing. He was thinking of something else. My nephew is not curious, and I think has very little of the artist in him."

"Say that he is frightfully matter-of-fact."

"'Frightfully' is a little harsh; but I confess that I find him a little rigid in his virtues, — even a little misan-

thropic for one of his age. I ought to try to cure him of his distrust and timidity."

"And you will present me to him next winter?"

"I don't know that I can decide about that. His is a nature in which a good disposition does not drive out obstinacy."

"Then he resembles me?"

"Oh, not at all! he is quite your opposite. He always knows what he wants and what he is. Instead of delighting in influencing others, he shuts himself up to his own rights and his own duty, with a narrowness which I do not always approve, but which I am willing to pardon on account of his other qualities."

"What qualities?"

"Well, integrity, courage, modesty, pride, disinterestedness, and, above all, his affection for me."

We were interrupted by the arrival of the Marquis de Rivonnière. Cesarine glanced at herself in the mirror, and, finding that her toilet was correct, left me to go and receive him.

This will be the appropriate time to introduce to my story this gentleman, who for the last few weeks had been the most assiduous of all our country neighbors; but I think it will be better for me, instead of interrupting the narrative, to let Cesarine paint the man who was now aspiring openly to her hand.

"What do you think of him?" she asked, after he was gone.

"Nothing yet," I replied, "except that he has a fine figure and a handsome face. I do not intrude myself into the drawing-room when neither you nor your father requests my presence, and I have hardly spoken to the marquis more than two or three times."

"Well, for the future, I ask your dear presence whenever the marquis calls. My aunt is a bad duenna, and allows him to make love to me."

"Your father has told me that he has witnessed with pleasure his attentions to you, and that he will offer no opposition, at least before you have had time to become acquainted. I believe that is agreed between him and the Marquis de Rivonnière. You are to decide if you wish to marry soon; and, in case you do, he will be formally proposed; and he is regarded as both an honorable and a brilliant match. If you do not accept him, word will be given out that you do not yet wish to settle down in life; and M. de Rivonnière will say that he has not been able to induce you to change your mind."

"Yes, that's what papa has *told* me too; but what he *thinks* he has told neither of us."

"What do you suppose he thinks?"

"He earnestly desires that I should marry as soon as possible, on condition that we shall not be parted. My good father loves me, but he fears me also. He wants, while keeping me near himself, to be relieved of the responsibility which weighs upon him. He finds himself forced to indulge me, and he resigns himself to that; but he is all the time afraid that I shall abuse his good-nature. The more studious, retired, in a word, reasonable, I am, the more he dreads an outburst of my imprisoned will into unheard-of eccentricities."

"Do you not encourage this dread by some thoughtless inconsistencies, which you might avoid displaying before him?"

"I encourage this feeling purposely, because it preserves to me the authority which he would resume if he found me too docile. Don't be angry with

me, dear friend: I manage my father for his own good as well as mine. What means I use do not concern you: let your conscience rest easy. My aim is good and laudable. To reach it my father must retain his responsibility, and not delegate it to a new-comer, who would cause me renewed labor to bring him into submission."

"I don't think you would have much difficulty with M. de Rivonnière. He passes generally for a very quiet and mild-mannered gentleman."

"That's no sign. It is easy to be mild towards others when one is very decided in character. I'm of a gentle disposition also; am I not?"

"Tell me what you think of him, then."

"Certainly. He is one who in the time of Louis XIII. or Louis XIV. would have been called a Grand Seigneur, and here is how he would have been described: 'A handsome cavalier, skilful with every weapon, of excellent spirit, agreeable in conversation, of courtly manners, and graceful in the dance.' When that had been said in those days of a man of the world, all was said, and nothing further was to be desired. Women of to-day are more exacting; and I, for instance, should have the right to ask if this magnificent creature had a heart, education, judgment, and domestic virtues. The Dietrich family is honorable if plebeian, and has no low tastes; and, as you who are of a real old family must have noticed, we are not altogether vulgar. That is because we are very honest, and very proud. I presume to unite in myself all the honesty and all the pride of my humble family. The perfections of a gentleman, therefore, affect me but very little, if he has not the virtues of an honest man; and I have never heard what they say of the Marquis de Rivonnière in that respect. I want to believe that my father is not deceived in him; that he has a noble character; that nothing serious against him is known; and that he is charitable, benevolent, universally loved by his poor neighbors, and esteemed by all who know him. But that isn't enough. He is rich, which is a good thing: he won't need my fortune, — at least, that cannot be his motive in seeking me. I want to know what is the nature of his ambition, which is perhaps not an evil one, and which must not be too grasping; thus far I can't penetrate the mystery. Sometimes he appears astonished at my opinions; then all at once he pretends to admire them, to agree with me, and to treat me as a prodigy which puzzles and dazzles him. That's what I call making love to me, and which I will not permit. I want him to let me judge him, to explain his opinions if I shock him with mine, to defend himself if I attack him. My aunt, who is resolved to find him perfect because he is a marquis, prevents me from piquing him when I wish, by hastening to explain my words in the sense most favorable to his vanity. That worries and wearies me; and I want you by me to help me against her, and assist me in seeing through him."

VI.

TWO days afterwards the marquis brought a fine saddle-horse, which he had promised Cesarine to procure for her. He had kept it in his stable for a month to try it and train it. He would keep it for himself, he said, if it did not please her.

Cesarine ran to put on her riding-dress, and then mounted the horse, which she rode admirably. In fifteen

minutes she dismounted lightly; saying to M. de Rivonnière, who had been watching her with rapture, "This horse is an exquisite machine, but he is too highly trained. He has neither will nor instinct: he is too mechanical. If he suits you, keep him: he bores me with his tameness."

"There's a very simple way," said the marquis, "to make him less manageable; that is, to let him forget a little of what he has been taught, by turning him into a pasture. I will agree to make him more fiery."

"Oh! it isn't the lack of fire I complain of. He has no originality. It is with horses as with human beings: education stunts natures which have not inexhaustible resources. I prefer a savage beast, which may possibly kill me, to a well-regulated machine which makes me as sleepy as itself."

"Then," said the marquis, "you prefer a rude but forcible individuality" —

"To a personality extinguished by good-breeding," she replied hotly. "But I beg pardon: I am a little warm with exercise, and I will go and dress."

She turned her back upon him, and returned to the house, gathering up her dress as she went just to the tops of her little boots. M. de Rivonnière followed her with his eyes as if in a sort of revery; then, seeing me near, offered me his arm, while M. Dietrich and his sister followed at a short distance. I saw that the marquis wished to be on good terms with me, for he showed me great deference; and, after broaching the subject with some embarrassment, opened his heart to me. "I think I understand," said he, "that my yielding to her is not pleasing to Mlle. Dietrich, and that she would like in me a more original character, and a more independent spirit. However, I am altogether sensible of her superiority over me, and I am not dismayed by it: it is something to be counted upon."

What he said seemed to me very sensible, and the language of an intelligent man.

"It is certain," I answered, "that in this age of egotism and scepticism, it is not the way of the world to accept the merit of a superior woman without objection or fear. But may I ask if it is the taste and the respect for such merit in general which actuates you, or if you see in this particular case particular qualities which attract you?"

"Both. I am captivated by the beautiful and the good, — much more by one who exhibits them in her own person."

"Then you are enamoured of Cesarine. Well, you are not the only one. Everybody who comes near her submits to the charm of her moral and physical perfectness. It must be an exceptional devotion, however, which can win her favor."

"I am aware of that. I know the measure of my own devotion, and have no fear that any one will surpass me in that respect; but there are a thousand ways of expressing devotion and love, while the occasions for proving it may be rare and difficult. The expression of love often charms women more than the proof of it; and I confess that I do not yet know in what form to present the future to her, but I would like to promise it as bright and unclouded as possible."

"Don't ask me for advice: I don't know you well enough to give it."

"Know me, then, Mlle. de Nermont. I only ask that. When Mlle. Dietrich interrogates me, I am embarrassed, and perhaps do not tell her

the exact truth. With you I will be less timid, and will answer you with as much confidence as if you were my own sister. Ask me questions: it is just what I want. If you are not pleased with me, you shall tell me so, and reprove me. Whatever comes from your lips shall be a divine command, and I will not rebel."

"Well, then, are you, as they say, of a very pleasant disposition?"

"Usually; but I am sometimes very angry."

"And you cannot contain your anger?"

"That depends. I can repress it generally; but, when my self-respect is wounded, I become insane in my violence and folly."

"What do you do in your madness?"

"How can I know? I never remember, because I have no consciousness of what I am doing."

"Others tell you sometimes, I suppose?"

"Never the truth. I have always been indulged by my family, and from my servants have received nothing but flattery."

"That's a proof that you are really good."

"Is it? Who knows! Perhaps it is only a proof that I am rich."

"Do you so despise human nature? Have you no true friends?"

"Oh, yes! but then they have never so wounded me, and don't even know that I ever become violent."

"That indeed. What should you do if a friend should play false?"

"I don't know."

"And if a woman you loved should refuse you?"

"I don't know that any better. Don't you see that I am yet, as it were, an animal; because I don't know myself or how to reveal myself to myself?"

"Then you have never made the least self-examination?"

"I try not to repeat my faults; but I do not foresee my liability to error, and I do not believe it possible to foresee it."

"Why not?"

"Because every cause of trouble is new. No circumstances occur identical with those of which we have experience. See, I pray you, in me only what I see in myself, — perfect sincerity in good intentions. It would be easy for me to tell you that I am a good man, and that I would promise always to be such. That is a part of the commonplace which every lover owes to the parents and friends of his betrothed. Well, if I should ever have the rare good fortune to be the betrothed of your Cesarine, I will promise to be as sincere then as when today I tell you that I love her. I will not, however, say that I am worthy of her in all respects, and that I deserve to be loved."

"Could you promise to love her always? Are you constant in your affections?"

"Certainly. I am faithful in my friendships; but, in fact, I have never loved any woman but my mother and my sister, and have no knowledge of the love a virtuous wife can inspire."

"What do you say? You have never loved?"

"No: is that remarkable?"

"How old are you?"

"Thirty."

"There's a bad note for my memorandum of you, — never loved, and thirty years old."

"Why, what would you have? Of course I cannot call the feelings of a youth towards every pretty girl love.

It seems to me, however, impossible not to love Mlle. Dietrich with a genuine passion, and not to love her always. Although I feel as though I had been refused by her, and know that she has ill-treated me, I am as much enchanted with her as I was two or three days ago when she gave me a few kind words."

We went into the parlor, where Cesarine, who had walked more quickly than we, and who was active in every thing that she did, was already seated at the piano. She had dressed in exquisite taste, and rose a little abruptly on seeing the marquis enter. A little shade of impatience passed over her face. It was evident that she had not expected him to return. He saw it, and took his leave; and it was several days before he came again.

At first Cesarine declared that she was delighted that she had discouraged him, and then she was vexed at his sensitiveness. She was amiable, then she was cruel. When his sulkiness was over he came again; and then she snubbed him, and he again became sulky. So it went on for months, and it seemed as though the play might last forever.

Cesarine studied him well, and discovered in him great and valuable traits of character, — a real gallantry, a remarkable temperament, true generosity of soul, excellent culture, sterling goodness, and an agreeable manner when he was not repulsed. Indeed, he so little deserved to be snubbed, that he was right in not enduring it from her.

At the end of our stay in the country, M. Dietrich urged Cesarine to explain her feelings towards the marquis.

"I haven't decided," she replied. "I honor and esteem him very much. If he is contented to be my friend, I shall always see him with pleasure; but if he wishes that I should now, or soon, decide about marriage, I don't want him to come any more, or at least no oftener than our other neighbors."

M. Dietrich would not accept this strange answer. He remonstrated with her, and told her that a woman cannot make a friend simply of a man who is in love with her. "But that's precisely what I mean to do," replied Cesarine. "I find the friendship of men more sincere and more noble than that of women; and, if a woman drives all men away, she finds herself alone with persons of the lovely, jealous, treacherous sex. I have but one female friend, Pauline. I don't want another. There is my aunt, indeed; but she is more my child than my friend."

"But then, for male friends, you have me and your uncle. You ought to be contented with us."

"You forget, papa, some dozens of young and old cousins, who are very cordially attached to me, I am sure, and whom you would like for me to love. Not one of them aspires to my hand. Some of them are married, and fathers of families; the others know too well what is due to you to make love to me. I don't see why the marquis should not do as they do, but for another reason, — the fear of losing me."

"Fortunately the marquis would not accept the ridiculous position."

"I beg pardon, papa. In default of a better, he does accept it."

"Ah, indeed! You said to him, 'Be my pander to the pleasure of existence.'"

"No: I said, 'Be my companion until further orders.'"

"Her companion!" cried M. Dietrich, turning to me with a shrug of the shoulders. "My dear friend, she has become insane."

"Yes, I know it," said Cesarine. "The fact is," bursting into a laugh, "that I haven't common sense. Well, I'll tell M. de Rivonnière that you think me very absurd, and that we musn't see each other any more."

With that she took her work, and began to sew with provoking calmness. Her father watched her a little while, hoping to see anger or sorrow display itself beneath this summary settlement of the question. He saw nothing of the kind: all the disappointment was his. He had taken Jacques de Rivonnière into intimate friendship, encouraged him much, earnestly desired him for a son-in-law. He had not concealed this wish from Cesarine, and naturally she was resolved to improve her opportunity.

When we were alone I scolded her. She listened, as she always did, with an astonished air; and, having allowed me to say all I would, she answered me with playful tenderness, "You are right perhaps. I have given papa pain, and have seemed to force him to tolerate a singular relation between the marquis and myself, or else to cause him to give up a plan which is very near his heart. It is therefore necessary that I should either give up a friendship which is very pleasant to me, or that I should marry a man whom I do not love, and for whom, therefore, I should have neither respect nor sympathy. Is that what is wanted? Perhaps I am equal to the grand sentiment, that one is always happy in doing one's duty, however difficult it may be. Ought I to sacrifice myself, and perform my dolorous and heroic duty? I don't say that I couldn't. But, frankly, is M. de Rivonnière a person so sublime, and has my father vowed to him such a friendship, that I ought to rivet upon myself this chain in order to please them, and to sacrifice my life, which every one professes to wish to make happy? Say, dear Pauline: this is becoming very serious."

"Authorize me," said I, "to repeat what you have said to your father and the marquis. Both will give up the idea of opposing you. Your father will deprive himself of this new friend; and the new friend, whom you have only persuaded to wait as long as you give him hope, will understand that his patience may compromise your reputation, and result only in disappointment to himself."

"Do as you will," she replied. "I only desire peace and liberty."

"It will be better, since you are so reasonable, that you should yourself tell M. de Rivonnière to put an end to his hopes."

"I have already done so."

"And that you make the sacrifice of dismissing him as well in the interest of his dignity, as of your own reputation."

"He does not agree to that. He asks to see me, however seldom, and on such conditions as it shall please me to impose. He demands to know what makes him unworthy to enter our house. It is for my father to forbid him. I think it cruel and unjust, and I will not undertake the task."

Nothing could make her come to terms. M. Dietrich recoiled from the duty. He did not wish to shut his doors upon the marquis, knowing that they would be re-opened on the first new caprice of Cesarine. Besides, such a course would compel him to

put away forever the hopes he had cherished.

The marquis was therefore authorized to call upon us in Paris, and Cesarine accepted this paternal concession as something due to her, and for which she had no one to thank. Her amiable disposition and gracious manner did not permit us to tax her with being imperious and eccentric. She on her part yielded nothing. She would say, "I love you:" never "I thank you."

VII.

WE returned to Paris at the usual time; and Cesarine, who had arranged her batteries, struck a grand blow, making M. de Rivonnière the pretext. She wanted to induce her father to re-open his parlors, and to draw back the brilliant and numerous society which had filled them while his wife was living. Cesarine argued with him, that, if he restricted her to the companionship of the family, she should never marry, because the appearance of every new suitor would be a great event in their little circle; that, however few were admitted after M. de Rivonnière, she would get the reputation of being a coquette or of one difficult to marry; and that only the general admission of society at large into this little cloister of the faithful could give her an opportunity to examine suitors without entangling herself with them, or being compromised by any one of them in particular. M. Dietrich was compelled to yield to the force of these arguments, so much more worthy than those of his wife, who had been guided in such wishes purely by the love of pleasure. He had yielded with bad grace to his wife; he submitted more gracefully to his daughter: and a great party was planned to inaugurate the new life which we were about to lead.

I asked Cesarine, the morning after the ball, which had been laboriously prepared and went off magnificently, seeing her still wearied with the excitement of the preceding night, if she was satisfied at last.

"Satisfied with what?" she replied, — "with another experience of the excitement with which I was familiar from childhood? Do you take me for a young girl intoxicated with her first ball? or do you think that the world has changed so much in three years that I no longer know it?"

Notwithstanding numerous and pressing invitations, M. de Rivonnière, on whose account Cesarine had led her father to so important a step and to incur so great an expense, did not profit by the occasion presented. He came neither to the first nor to the second party. His friends said that he was sick. Servants were sent to inquire for his health, and he had left the city.

One day, as I was doing some shopping I met him. We were both on foot. After a little hesitation, I spoke to him. He was not dressed with his usual care. He looked, if not downcast, at least very abstracted. He appeared not to care to answer my questions; and I was about to take my leave of him, when, as by a sudden impulse, he offered me his arm. "I must speak to you," he burst out; "for perhaps Mlle. Dietrich has not told you all the truth about our mutual relations. Perhaps she does not even understand them herself. She is not herself angry with me, and she does not know perhaps that I am angry with her."

This seemed to me a strong way to

describe the rupture of any relations they might have had together; and I said so.

"You think rightly," said he, "that it is difficult to speak clearly of love and marriage to a young lady so carefully watched by you. But when interviews are impossible, correspondence is not: and Mlle. Dietrich has not refused to read my letters; she has even deigned to answer them."

"Are you speaking the truth?" I cried.

"I can prove it. When you were just now about to take leave of me, I felt that I ought to return her letters. Will you permit me to have them carried to you this evening?"

"Certainly. In this you act like a gentleman."

"No: I act like a man who wants to cure himself of a false hope. The letters sent to me by Mlle. Dietrich might be read in a public assembly, so pure and cold are they. She hasn't asked me to return them. I doubt if she has ever thought of doing so. If the act of writing them was an imprudence, the manner of doing so is on her part a guarantee of its safety. She is able to explain her feelings, and say every thing that she wishes, without giving her correspondent the least advantage, and without giving her victims the least chance to blame her."

"Then, why are you angry with her?"

"I am vexed at the impossibility of pleasing, and at my own want of courage. At one time I was deceived when I saw that she was intriguing to allow me a place as an intimate friend. She offered me that position; and I was fool enough to persuade myself that a young person like herself would not accord it to a suitor for her hand, who was nevertheless destined to be supplanted by another. I let her see my stupid confidence; and she rallied me on it, and said that she was going to re-enter society, and only held on to me to enable her to do so. That made me indignant. I was wounded to the quick. I have renounced her; and you can tell her so."

"She will not believe it. Neither do I believe it."

"Well, then, let me tell you that I have placed an obstacle — a fault — between her and myself. I have thrown myself into an adventure, stupid, culpable even; but it diverts me, absorbs me, and prevents me from reflecting. That's better than to be a fool, or to be degraded by slavery to a woman like Mlle. Dietrich. There, my confession's made: this evening you shall have the letters. I am going back into the country, where I am hiding my foolish amour, only a few miles from Paris, while my friends believe me absent in Switzerland."

That evening I received from the marquis a little package very carefully sealed, which I placed in Cesarine's bureau. She would have felt very badly to have seen me in possession of this little secret. She did not know at first how the restitution had been brought about.

She did not speak of the matter at first; but about a week afterwards she told me about the affair, and asked me if I supposed that the letters had passed through her father's hands. I re-assured her on that point. "They may have been brought back," said I, "by the person who acted as your go-between in this correspondence."

"There was no such person," she declared. "I am not such a fool as to trust to my servants. We exchanged letters at each interview. He brought

his in a bouquet, and found mine in a certain music-book on the piano, which he would pretend to look over in a careless manner. He played that comedy well enough."

"And yet you asked me to be present at your interviews! Why write to him in secret, when you had only to make a sign to me to go away when you wanted to speak to him in confidence?"

"Oh! I don't know. The mystery of it amused me. And what would papa have said if I had caused you to fail in your duty? Come, don't scold me; for I have already blamed myself enough. Tell me how those letters came there. He must have taken somebody into his confidence. If I believed it was" —

"Don't accuse any one. It was myself."

"Indeed! Then you have seen him?"

I told her all, concealing only the means which M. de Rivonnière had adopted to cure himself of his attachment for her. That was a kind of explanation which one does not at this day make very freely to young girls, and which I had never wished to make to Cesarine, nor even before her. Her aunt was prudent only on this delicate point; and M. Dietrich, pure in his morals, was equally so in his language. Cesarine, therefore, notwithstanding her liberty of spirit, was very ignorant of the prurient details which are so shocking when first revealed to a young girl.

Cesarine supposed that the change on the part of the marquis was due to his having determined, in his hasty spite against her, to marry some one else. She seemed to be much hurt by it. "You see," said she, "I was right in doubting him, and in refusing to respond to his fine sentiments. He said that he should die if I took away all hope. I allowed him a little hope, and you see he is already cured of his attachment to me. Wait a minute: I'll show you his letters. We will read them together. It will be a good lesson to me. It's a first experience which I don't want to forget."

The letters of the marquis were written in a good style, although evidently without extraordinary care. I thought I could see in them the enthusiasm of very sincere love; and I could not help saying so. Cesarine laughed at me, and declared that I knew nothing about it: that I was reading what was a romance only in appearance, and that, as for herself, she had never been deceived by it. When we had finished reading the letters, she made as though she would cast both his and her own into the fire; but she thought better of it, collected them, tied them up with a black ribbon, and placed them in a corner of her bureau-drawer, sneering at the funeral of the first love which she had inspired. But I saw a great tear roll down her cheek, and thought to myself that all was not yet over between herself and M. de Rivonnière.

The winter passed, and he did not appear. A dozen other suitors presented themselves, offering a choice of age, rank, character, wealth, and disposition. Not one of them was encouraged, although no one was absolutely refused. Cesarine wished to establish a court about herself; but she allowed no direct homage to be paid her, especially at home. She delighted to show herself in public, with her admirers at a respectful distance. She allowed many to follow her, few to approach her.

We passed the summer at Mireval and at the seashore. We met M. de

Rivonnière again at the baths; and he bound his chains upon himself once more as if he had never broken them. He asked me if I had betrayed his secret. "No," I replied: "it was not of a nature to be betrayed. However, if you ever marry Cesarine, I shall require that you first confess to her; for I will not be your confidant in this."

"What!" he cried, "must I recount to a young girl, whose purity is sacred to me, the foolish adventures which a boy hardly tells to his comrades?"

"No, of course not; but if you are blameworthy, as you told me you were" —

"So much the more reason for keeping silent."

"It is against Cesarine that you have sinned; for you came back to her with a stain which you had not formerly."

"Well, so be it. I will confess when it is necessary. But, in order to have the courage for it, I must see that I am loved. Until then I am bound to nothing. I have rid myself of my encumbrance, and am free again. I have sacrificed to Cesarine a little love-scrape that was amusing enough at the time. What would not any one do to gain her love?"

But did Cesarine love him? From the pleasure she showed at having her chains upon him once more, one might have inferred that she did. She had really grieved at his absence. Her pride had been sorely wounded. She did not, however, let that appear, but received him as if he had parted from her only the night before: that was his punishment, and he felt it as such; and, when he wished to revive his hopes, she did not receive his requests with reproaches, but gave him exactly his position of the year before, — promises and assurances of friendship, a command not to speak of love. He consoled himself with the reflection that he was still the most favored of those who rendered homage to his idol.

I will here bring to an end the long and tedious history which I have been compelled to relate, of the events and of a situation which lasted until the time when Cesarine attained her majority. I intended to have cut short the story of the five years which I devoted to her instruction; and, indeed, I have omitted purposely to speak of several journeys, to give descriptions of places which she visited, and to mention persons of secondary importance, who had some influence on her character. Such matters would have led me too far. I come now to the events which seriously affected our several lives, but which could not have been understood if I had not made this analysis of a most remarkable character, whose development I had watched from day to day all through these years.

VIII.

I RESUME my story at the time when Cesarine reached her majority. Already had her father emancipated her to some extent by abandoning his intention of controlling her actions, and by putting her in the enjoyment of the fortune left by her mother, which was very considerable.

I had now devoted six years to her education: and I can truly say that I had taught her nothing; for in every thing her intelligence had far outstripped my ability to instruct her. As for her moral education, I do not know yet whether I ought to claim credit for it, or to assume responsibility for the good and the evil which were in her. The good, at that period, ex-

ceeded the evil; but I often had hard work to distinguish between them. Perhaps she was really only playing a trick upon me in pretending indecision.

One thing is certain. At the end of these six years I loved Cesarine with a sort of maternal passion, although I would indulge in no illusion as to the kind of love she bore me. It was graceful, charming, seductive on her part; devoted, solicitous, tender on mine; and it seemed as though our friendships were completed by what each brought to the other.

However, the happiness which was given to me by Cesarine and her father did not fill all the longings of my heart. There was one person, and one only, whom I preferred to them, and whose companionship would have been more sweet to me than theirs: of course I mean that of my nephew, Paul Gilbert. It had been for his sake that I became a member of the Dietrich family; and, if he had hinted at the slightest desire that I should do so, I should have quitted it, to join my poverty to his, since he still protested vigorously and with all his energy against profiting at all by what I might do for him. I decidedly did not like society, and not more the large group of those whom Cesarine called her intimate friends than the brilliant throng which was occasionally gathered in the drawing-rooms. My happiest hours were those passed in my own room with two or three of my own friends and my dear Paul, when he could tear himself away from his engrossing daily cares. I saw him less than the others of my own friends; and it was a great privation. Several times I spoke to him of renting a little room near his place of business, in order that at least he might dine with me.

But he invariably refused to make the slightest change in his manner of life. "You would not like to dine with me," he said; "for I sometimes have only five minutes to eat what is set before me; and I never have the time to know what I am eating. I see you think that very bad for me, my good aunt. You think that it is a very bad habit; that I ought to be thinking of having a house of my own; and that I ought to take an hour for dinner. But I cannot lose a moment. I don't dream: I act. I don't walk: I run. I don't smoke; I don't gossip; I don't dream, even when I am asleep. I go to bed early, and rise early. I am working to earn twelve thousand francs a year: I get four already. As I get better paid, I shall have less drudgery, and not such absorbing work. That isn't just; but it is the law of work, — to the weak the struggle."

"And when are you likely to earn a thousand francs a month?"

"In ten years."

"And when are you going to have leisure?"

"Never! Why should I have rest? Work wearies only the lazy and the stupid."

"I should hope by the privilege of resting to gain an opportunity to occupy myself according to the necessities of my intellect."

"I get that opportunity in the way of business. My employer publishes no frivolous works. I have read so much while with him, that I am not an ignoramus. Seeing that my knowledge is useful to him in judging of new books offered to him for publication, he allows me to follow that line, and to be more occupied with learning than with questions of the shop. When I oversee his store, do errands for him, run to the printer, correct

proofs, and do other work of the kind, I am a machine, I grant: but these duties serve to preserve my health; and I contrive always to have a book before me when a minute of respite is allowed. My employer adopts the motto, 'Time is money;' and accordingly he supplies me with a carriage for my longer errands: and so, while crossing Paris with the greatest rapidity, I have studied mathematics, and mastered two or three languages. You see I am happy; for I am developing myself according to the promptings of my disposition."

There was nothing to say in reply to this young stoic. I was proud of him, for he knew a great deal; and when I questioned him for my own personal profit, I was delighted with the promptness, the clearness, and the intelligence of his answers. I was charmed by his learning, his modesty, his courage; and I felt a sort of reverence for him; but I was disquieted in spite of myself by the perpetual strain upon his mind, insatiable in its craving for knowledge.

His youthful austerity alarmed me. His plain but interesting face was stamped too early with a certain sad rigidity and firmness. It was impossible to know whether he ever experienced physical or intellectual weariness. He declared that he did not know what pain was, and wondered at my anxiety. He had never known a desire, nor felt a regret, for certain advantages which fate had denied him. Although as it were a slave to his daily tasks, and in pecuniary circumstances by no means independent, he made his position one of entire liberty by accepting it as meeting all his tastes and satisfying all his instincts.

M. Dietrich often questioned me about him; and I was not able to conceal the anxiety which I felt every time I spoke of the dear boy. But little by little I learned to refrain from expressing my secret sorrow on his account; because when I did so M. Dietrich would offer to better Paul's condition, and that Paul would refuse in so haughty a manner, that I was driven to my imagination to invent untrue excuses for his refusal.

Cesarine was not deceived; and she felt really annoyed by the shyness of my nephew: She attributed it to some strange prejudice which he had taken against her father or herself. She inclined to the opinion that she was the victim of his prejudice, and was irritated, looking upon Paul's supposed dislike as, in a manner, an intentional offence against her. It was difficult for her to conceal the impatience she felt in speaking of a man, who, never having seen her, — for he had never been willing to be presented to her, and contrived never to come to my room when she was there, — could nevertheless urge the lightness of her spirits as an argument against her. He only acted thus to be on the opposite side from everybody else, she said; for, whether she were really something or nothing, all who came near her were pleased with her, found her amiable and good, and assured her that she was at least not of the common sort. She did not, she continued, ask praise or homage from any one; but hostility and prejudice irritated her. "All that I can admit for you is that your nephew affects originality, or that he is a little out of his head."

I saw her anger rising; and at last she came to the point of asking me, with a pettish manner altogether unusual to her, why I had spoken ill of her to my nephew. I answered by laughing at her insinuations. "You

know well," I said, "that I can never be tempted to speak ill of any one I love. The refusal of Paul to all your invitations is due to other causes, far less serious, but which it would be hard perhaps for you to understand. For one thing, he is like me, — he doesn't like society."

"Of that you know nothing," she answered, "nor he either. He has never tried it."

"All the more reason why he should dislike to show himself here. He is not so ignorant as not to know that he ought to bring here, if he comes, some understanding of society, good manners, good language, and attention to dress. He has not learned the vocabulary of the drawing-room; and he would hardly know how to make a bow."

"Then he ought to learn it in his book-store and in his visits to authors. You cannot make me believe that he is a boor in language and manners. His face tells a different story. There is some other reason."

"No: indeed I have told you the chief reason, — his dress. Paul cannot clothe himself like a gentleman without making a sacrifice."

"And you cannot make him accept even a black coat and a white cravat!"

"I could not make him accept a brass pin; and, besides, he hasn't time to spare. I am lucky if I see him one hour in a week."

"He is playing a trick upon you! I will engage that he has his follies like any one else. The Marquis de Rivonnière was not prevented from having his by his passion for me; and your nephew isn't always up to his ears in study."

"But he is; and he has no follies, I am sure."

"Then he is a saint; or perhaps he's a pedant, too well satisfied with himself to excite interest in any one else."

This bitter speech hurt me a little, notwithstanding the caresses and the excuses of Cesarine to make me forget it. My family honor was now at stake; and I resolved to show the Dietriches that my nephew was no pedant. And this was a grave mistake in my life, to which I was urged by a sudden impulse of anger.

A great fête was preparing for Cesarine's twenty-first birthday. On that day, her father was to give her, besides the full possession of all the property of her mother, an income from his own estate, and was thus to give her a dowry, as it were, although she would not yet make choice of a husband. She had showed such an aversion to dependence in the every-day details of life, even to the point of often depriving herself of what she wanted, rather than ask for it, that M. Dietrich had thus broken, of his own accord, this last link of filial dependence. Cesarine had attained her object, which was to bind him with her chains, and to make him love the fetters. He was henceforth — this austere father, this close reasoner — the most devoted and most submissive of her subjects.

She accepted his gifts with her accustomed grace. She was not fond of money; but she treated it as a blind slave which is abused because it does not obey quickly enough. She made a hundred plans for pleasure, but not one of marriage. M. Dietrich was so subservient, that he had persuaded himself that he no longer wished to see her married.

In the evening, there was a great ball, and Paul consented to attend. I extorted from him this sacrifice, telling him that they had attributed to some secret dissatisfaction on my part, which

I had confided to him, his objection to go to the Dietrich mansion. The objection did not exist, and the reasons which I had given to Cesarine were true. There were other reasons of which I was ignorant, but they were wholly different from any thing that Cesarine had imagined. The difficulty about Paul's dress was soon disposed of. Young Latour, who was about Paul's size, clothed him from head to foot. The total absence of any pretensions on his part resulted in his wearing the costume so new to him with entire ease. He presented himself without awkwardness; and, if he lacked experience, he had enough tact not to show it. The Dietrich brothers were much pleased, and congratulated me on having such a nephew, after a short conversation with him. I knew that it was their kindness to me which made them say what they did, as much as it was Paul's bearing: but Cesarine, more prejudiced, would be harder to suit; and I do not know what fatality it was which induced me to try to overcome her prejudices.

She was radiant both in her dress and in her own beauty, when, crossing the room, followed with admiration by her train of friends and suitors, she found herself face to face with Paul, whom I led towards her to be introduced. Paul was not a little curious to see thus in all its brilliancy "the much-praised star," as he termed Mlle. Dietrich; but his was a curiosity altogether philosophical, and as cool as that with which he would have set himself to study a rare manuscript or a problem in archæology. Cesarine's eyes had in them something audacious, and even defiant; and her look alarmed me. As soon as Paul had made his bow, I drew him by the arm, and led him away from her. I had a quick presentiment of dreadful consequences which might follow my imprudent act. I was upon the point of saying, "It is enough; go now:" but, in the crowd which pressed about the queen of the ball, I was quickly separated from Paul; and as I was the acting mistress of the ball, and charged with the entertainment of all the insignificant persons whom Cesarine did not condescend to notice, I lost sight of him for more than an hour. All at once, as I was crossing, to give some orders, a little passage-way so full of flowers and shrubbery that it had been made dark and secluded, I saw Cesarine and Paul seated alone in this solitary corner, almost concealed by the branches of a great bush which had been placed there. They were upon a sofa, and Cesarine was fanning herself as though she had been compelled by the heat to separate herself from the crowd; Paul like a man who had been captured, and held by force when he wished to escape.

"Ah! you come just in time," cried Cesarine, seeing me approach. "We were speaking about you; sit down. If you don't, all my choler will rise again when I am left alone again with your nephew. Just think, my dear, that he swears on his honor that I am totally uninteresting to him, seeing that he does not know any thing about me. Of course, the thing is impossible. You haven't given up six years of your life to stand in the place of sister and mother to me without ever having spoken of me to him as you have spoken of him to me. I know him well enough. I know him by what you have told me of his occupations, his character, his health, and every thing that interests him. I can tell you how many colds he has had, how many books he has read, how many

prizes he took at college, what virtues he possesses" —

"But," gayly interrupted my nephew, "you can't tell how many lies I have told my aunt so as to get candy when I had a cold, or to give her a high opinion of me when I passed my examinations. As for myself, I couldn't tell how much was due to the illusion of maternal love when she praised her brilliant pupil. So perhaps you do me no more honor in knowing me than I do in my appreciation of you."

"You are not polite," said Cesarine with angry dignity.

"That's very true," he replied in an incisive tone. "I am not more gallant than the furniture or the statuary in this fairy palace. My part is like theirs, — to hold the place assigned to me, and to have no opinion upon the things or the persons which I am expected to see before me."

"And which, really, you do not see?"

"And which, really, I do not see."

"Because you are dazzled?"

"Because I am near-sighted."

Cesarine arose with an air of impatience, which she did not try to hide. It was the first time that I had ever seen her so excited; and so I was too much bewildered to attempt a plan for improving the aspect of affairs. "My dear friend," said she, roughly snatching away her fan, which I was holding mechanically, "your nephew is very intellectual, but he is ill-natured. I solemnly assure you, that, in giving him an appointment here in this passage-way, I came to him as a sister to a brother whose character she does not yet know. He is your adopted son, as I am your adopted daughter. We have both travelled, he in his path and I in mine, on the journey of life; and we have both acquired already some experience of men and things, about which we might have chatted in a friendly way. You see how he has received me. I have been obliged to make all the advances, thanks to you; but now you must allow me to repudiate every thing I have done. His aversion for me is so open and pronounced, that I owe it to myself to be interested in him no more."

I wanted to answer; but Paul squeezed my arm so hard, that I could not help crying out.

Cesarine observed it; and smiled with an expression of disdain which was not very different from hatred. She went away, but Paul held me back still. "Let her go, aunt! let her go!" he said as soon as she was gone. And then he continued vehemently, "I tell you that that girl is mad or wicked. She is accustomed to rule everybody, and she wishes to put her foot on everybody's neck."

"No," said I. "She is good. She is a spoiled child, and a little coquettish; that's all. What does that matter to you?"

"Very true: what does it matter to me?"

"What makes you tremble?"

"I don't know. Do I tremble?"

"You are as angry as she. Come, what was the cause? What was she saying when I came? Had she really made an appointment with you there?"

"Yes: a servant brought me, just as I was going to leave the ball, a little note — Have I lost it? — No: here it is — look: 'In the little passage-way arranged as an arbor, behind the largest bush, at once.' Aunt, did you write that?"

"Never; but it looks like my hand. When I came here, Cesarine wrote very badly. She liked my handwrit-

ing, and has copied it so long, that she has come to imitate it exactly."

"Then she did give me this rendezvous, or rather, to be more exact, this summons to appear at her bar. I was deceived; for I supposed that you had something important to say to me. I threw down my overcoat, which I had already taken on my arm, and ran here. She was seated on this sofa, flashing light from her be-spangled fan into the dark shade of this arbor. I had not seen her from a distance, and only recognized her when she made me a sign to sit down beside her, saying in an unconstrained manner, 'If any one comes, I will go this way, and you that; for it is not usual for a young girl to arrange a private interview with a young man in this way, and I might be blamed. I do not blame myself, however; and that's enough for me. Now listen: I know that you don't like me, and I wish your friendship. I won't go until you promise it to me.' Perfectly astounded at this, but still not believing that so audacious a piece of coquetry could be real, I replied that I could not like a person without being acquainted with her; and that, not being able to get acquainted with her, I could not like her."

"'And why not get acquainted?'

"'I haven't time.'

"'You think it will take a long time?'

"'Very likely. I don't know any thing of the Babel which is called society: I understand neither its language, its manners, nor its silence.'

"'Then in me you see only a woman of society.'

"'Isn't it in society that I find you?'

"'Why have you never been willing to see me at home?'

"'My aunt has told you, of course. I have no leisure.'

"'You find time, nevertheless, to converse with authors and such people. Some of them are here. I have asked them if they know you; and they said that you were a very promising young man'—

"'In business?'

"'In every respect.'

"'And you wanted to find out for yourself?'

"'That is too bad. You cannot believe me capable of such a motive?'

"'It is because I believe you capable of it, that my little pride refuses to be subjected to the test.'

"She did not say any thing at first," said Paul: "but then, resuming that play with her fan which reminded me of a squirrel turning in its cage, cried, 'Do you know, sir, that you have hurt me very much?'

"I arose in alarm, fearing that I had trodden upon her foot. 'You don't understand,' said she, bidding me be seated again. 'I have been brought up with generous ideas. I have been taught benevolence like a sister of charity; and I am now, for the first time in my life, face to face with a suspicious and prejudiced man. All injustice is revolting to me, and makes me indignant. I would like to know the cause of your aversion.'

"In vain I protested, in the politest manner I could assume, my utter indifference to her in any way. She replied to me with strange sophisms. Indeed, my dear aunt, you have never told me the truth about your pupil. Upright and simple as I know you to be, that perverse girl must have made you suffer martyrdom; for she is perverse, I assure you. I can find no

other word to express it. It is impossible for me to repeat our conversation; for it is confused in my brain as an extravagant dream. But I am sure that she told me I was in love with her, and that my distrust of her was only jealousy. And when I denied having preserved any remembrance of her face, she told me that I lied, and that I might as well confess the truth, because I would not offend her by so doing, knowing as she did, she said, that between persons of our age friendship for man began inevitably, invariably, with love for woman.

"I asked, a little roughly perhaps, if this fatality was reciprocal. 'Happily, no,' she replied with a mocking, almost bitter tone, which neutralized a glance that was intended, without doubt, to transfix me. Then understanding that I was not dealing with a little fool, but with a great coquette, I said to her, 'Mlle. Dietrich, you are too strong for me. You claim that a pure young girl can permit herself to run after men without ceasing to be pure. That may be the morals of the world, which I don't know, and which I will never know; for, thanks to you, I have discovered that I should be very much out of place in it, and should not like it at all.' If I did not say this in those very words, that was what I expressed, and clearly enough to provoke the anger which she was exhibiting when you arrived on the scene.

"And now, aunt, can you say that she is only a spoiled and rather coquettish child? I say that she is already a corrupt and very dangerous woman to one who is not altogether on his guard. She thought that I was not, but she found her mistake. I did not know her. I was totally indifferent to her: now, if she were to talk with me, and question me, I might tell her frankly that I had a strong antipathy against her."

"That is precisely why, my dear boy," I replied, "you should not any more expose yourself to her questioning. You must go now; and, whenever you come to see me again, you must knock three times at the garden-gate. I will open to you myself, and together we shall be able to defend ourselves against the enemy, if she is present. I see that Cesarine has made you afraid; and I am aware that all opposition irritates her, and that she is capable of being very obstinate. Such as she is I love her; you know that! One is not occupied with the care of a child for six years, without becoming attached to her, whatever she may be. I know her faults and her excellencies. I was wrong to induce you to come here, because the result is an increase of your repugnance for her, and because she is to blame for the result. I entreat you, by your love for me, to think no more about it, and to forget the absurdities of this evening as if you had dreamed them. Can you do so?"

"Certainly, my dear aunt: I think I have already done so."

"I need not tell you also that you owe it to my affection for Cesarine, never to relate to any one the silly adventure of this evening."

"I know it. I am neither a fool nor a tell-tale; and I am well aware that the laugh would be upon me. I am going now; and you will not see me again for several days, weeks perhaps. My employer is going to send me to Germany on business; and that is very fortunate just now."

"Yes, for Cesarine, perhaps. She will have time to repent of her fault and forget it. As for you, I suppose

that you don't need time to get over the childish folly."

"Aunt, I understand: you think me too much excited, and you are troubled by it. I will not leave you without re-assuring you, although the explanation is a delicate matter. Neither my mind nor my heart has been disturbed by the language of Mlle. Dietrich. On the contrary, both my heart and my mind are repelled by her type of woman. More, my eyes are not captivated by the beauty which is the expression of such a character. In a word, Mlle. Dietrich does not please me at all. But handsome or not, a woman who offers herself to a man of my age, especially when she does so for the purpose of mocking and deceiving him, thrusts trouble upon him. One may handle the embers of love without being consumed, but not without burning his fingers. That irritates, and makes one smart. Now, I confess that I feel like a man stung by a wasp; that's all. I am not afraid of another attack; but even to fight against such an enemy is so puerile, that I will not expose myself to a second sting. I ought to respect the wasp on your account; and I cannot crush it. This battle with fans would drive me mad. I don't desire to renew it. My indignation is gone. I am going away very calm, as you see. You may rest easy too. I swear to you that Mlle. Dietrich shall not make shipwreck of my life, and that two hours hence, when I am correcting my proofs, I shall not miss noticing a single comma."

He was indeed calm; and we separated.

When I returned to the ballroom, I found Cesarine dancing with the Marquis de Rivonnière, and seeming very gay.

IX.

THE next morning, she came to my room. "Do you know the latest news from the ball?" she asked. "They found fault because I was covered with diamonds. The gentlemen told me that I hadn't enough of them, they became me so well; but the ladies were angry because I had more than they; and my good friends told me, with tender solicitude for me, that I was wrong to affect the extravagance of a woman while I was only a young, unmarried lady. I answered, as I had made up my mind to do, 'I am of age to-day; and I am not even sure that I ever wish to marry. I own diamonds which are vainly waiting for my wedding-day; and I am tired of seeing them glittering in my jewel-box. I gave them their freedom to-day; but, if they do not look well upon me, I will imprison them again. Do you think they do not become me?' This question brought down upon me a storm of compliments; but, on the part of my good lady friends, it was a snow-storm. Then I saw that my triumph was complete; and my jewels are not to be punished."

"I supposed," said I, "that you would have had something more serious to speak about."

"No: that is the most serious event of my birthday."

"Not in my opinion. The appointment with my nephew was a pleasantry, I know, but it was very wrong; and I am exceedingly displeased with you."

Cesarine was not accustomed to be reproached in this straightforward manner; the whole effort of her life having been to have her own way, without giving any one a pretext for blaming her. She was stupefied, and

her big blue eyes upon me without finding a word with which to confound me for my boldness.

"My dear child," I resumed, "it is not your governess who speaks to you; for I am so no longer. You are your own mistress, emancipated from all constraint; and, as your father must have told you that henceforward I shall be paid no salary for a work which I have finished, there are between you and me only the bonds of friendship."

"You are going to leave!" she cried, casting herself on her knees before me with a movement so quick, and so full of grief, that I was much touched; but I feared that it was only one of those little dramas which she played so naturally, only to laugh at her success an hour later.

"I do not intend to leave you for that," I replied, "at least" —

She interrupted me with a reproach for my formal manner of addressing her. "You don't love me any more! If you talk so, I will not listen. I will go to my room and have a good cry."

"Well, I will not leave you unless you force me to by making sport of all my devotion and love."

"How could I think of such a thing?"

"I have told you that it is not the governess who speaks. Now, it is not even the friend, but the aunt of Paul Gilbert. Do you understand me now?"

"Ah, good gracious, your nephew! Why, what is the matter with him? Have I, without meaning it, made him in love with me?"

"You did mean it," I answered, offended by the secret joy which the smile with which she had spoken betrayed. "It would have been a fine vengeance upon his insubordination; but he will not allow you to taste this pleasure of the gods. He is not, and he never will be, in love with you. You have lost your pains; and one loses prestige in laying aside dignity."

"Did he say so?"

"Yes; and he did not forbid me to repeat it to you."

"The fool!" she said, with a burst of laughter that was terrible to hear.

"Yes, yes," I continued. "I heard the menace; and I know you better than you think. You suppose that I am so captivated by you that I can see only the better side of your character; but I am a woman, and am not without some discernment. I love you for your good qualities; but I see your great faults, or I ought to say your great fault, for there is but one, and yet it is a terrible one."

"Too great self-esteem, isn't it?"

"Yes; and I fear very much for you on account of it. It is war to the death which you have undertaken against this wretched rebel, whom you deem incapable of resistance. You are mistaken: he will resist. He has one weapon which you have not, — the wisdom of modesty."

"Which is quite the opposite of the frenzy of over self-esteem? Well, if I am as dreadful a character as you say, you will kindle the flame of my will by showing me some one stronger than myself. But don't be uneasy, Pauline: I am not the heroine of a drama or a romance, as you think. I am a woman both frivolous and serious: I love a contest for the mastery. Vengeance is delicious to me, but pardon is not less so; and just as soon as you ask forgiveness for your nephew, I will stop worrying him."

"I shall not beg pardon of you; but you ought to ask it of me for the wicked trifling which did not succeed,

but which you wished to be successful, even at the expense of making me unhappy by wounding him whom of all the world I love best. For this premeditated, and therefore blameworthy act, I will never forgive you until you have repented of it."

I had never before spoken thus to Cesarine; and she was almost offended at my severity. I saw her turn pale with chagrin, shame, and vexation. She still tried to contend. "Those are harsh words," she said with an effort; for her lips trembled, and she stammered. "I don't receive orders, you know; and I regard myself as relieved from every duty when one tries to impose law upon me."

"I shall make one law for you, nevertheless. Give me your word of honor to renounce your wicked design, or I go away, never to return."

She burst into tears. "I see how it is," she cried: "you seek a pretext to leave me. You have neither charity nor tenderness for me. You do all you can to irritate me, so that I may forget myself, and speak one unkind word; and then you can declare that you have been insulted. Well, this is all I will say. You are cruel; and you break my heart. It is all the work of M. Paul: he has not understood me; he is my enemy; he has calumniated me to you. He is jealous of your affection: he wishes it all for himself. He is perfectly contented because he has made me lose it. Then, since this is so, hear my justification, and withdraw your malediction. Your Paul is not a plaything for me: I seriously desire his friendship. In asking it, I feel my own friendship springing up so earnest, so sudden, that perhaps it is love."

"Be silent!" I screamed: "you are lying now, and that is worse than all!"

"Since when," she answered, rising up with a majestic dignity, "have you believed me capable of descending to a lie? Will you know all? Know all, then! I love Paul Gilbert, and I wish to marry him!"

"Good gracious! That is indeed a new idea! Enough, my poor girl! Don't become foolish to justify your wrong-doing."

"What is there in my idea so strange and wild? Am I not old enough to know what I think? and am I not free to love whom I will. Wait, and you shall see!"

And she ran towards her father, who was just seeking us to carry us to sail on the lake. "Listen, darling father," said she, throwing her arms around his neck. "I don't want to sail: I want to get married. Do you consent?"

"Oh, yes, if you love any one!" replied he unhesitatingly.

"I do love some one."

"Ah! the marquis" —

"Not at all. It is not the marquis who pleases me. He whom I love has no title. Is that all right?"

"Certainly."

"He is not rich: he has nothing. That makes no difference, does it?"

"Not the least; but I wish him to be pure, intelligent, industrious, a man of real merit, and, in one word, earnest."

"He is all that."

"Young?"

"Twenty-three or twenty-four."

"Then he's too young, — a mere boy."

I stopped Cesarine from repl
"He is a mere boy," I replied m
"and consequently he is o
youth, whose merit has r
its fruit. Don't listen t
is mad this morning.

taken one of the most insensate, most absurd, and most impossible of all her caprices. She caps the climax of her folly in speaking of it before me. It is a lack of regard and respect for me, and I am very much more offended by it than you could be."

M. Dietrich, astonished at the harshness of my language, looked at me intently. He approached me, and, kissing my hand, said, "I can guess what is the matter. Cesarine has seen him, then?"

"She spoke with him yesterday for the first time."

"Then she cannot love him! And he?" —

"He detests me," answered Cesarine.

"Ah, very good!" said M. Dietrich, smiling. "That's the trouble, eh? Well, well, my poor child, try to make him love you; but I warn you of one thing, that you must marry him, for I will not let you impose upon any one else the illusory position which you gave to M. de Rivonnière. I observed at the ball how ridiculous was the situation in which he was placed. Every one was pointing at him, every one calls him a fool: you pass for a mocking creature, and from that to being regarded as a coquette is but a step."

"Well, papa, I will not pass for a coquette, because I will marry the man whom I have chosen."

"Do you consent, Mlle. de Nermont?" asked M. Dietrich.

"No," I replied. "I forbid it formally; and, if it has come to that, in the name of my nephew, I refuse."

"You cannot refuse in his name, because he knows nothing about the matter at all," cried Cesarine; "and you have no right to dispose of his future without consulting him."

"I will not consult him, because he ought not to know that you are so mad."

"You would rather he should think me a coquette? He might love me, but you would prefer that he should hate me? It is you, Pauline, who have become mad. Listen, papa. Yesterday I was guilty of a bad action: it was the first of my life, and may it be the last! I wished to punish M. Paul for his haughtiness towards us, towards myself particularly. I made advances to him with the intention of plunging him in despair when I had brought him to my feet. It was very wrong, I know; and I am punished for it. I am consumed in the fire which I kindled. I have felt love gnawing at my heart; and, if I do not marry this man, I will never marry: I will become an old maid."

"You may remain unmarried, or you may marry. You may do whatever you will, except compromise yourself. Come, Mlle. de Nermont, why should you oppose this marriage if Cesarine's intention is really serious? That may be the case; and, so far as I am concerned, she could not have made a better choice. M. Gilbert is young; but, I retract my words, he is not a boy. His proud bearing before us, his letters which you have showed me, his courage for work, the kind of stoicism which marks him, and indeed the very serious anxiety, inspired from above I have no doubt, which I had yesterday about him, are considerations, without speaking of his family, which is respectable and distinguished, without speaking of another thing, which has very great weight with me nevertheless, his relationship to you, the advice and example which he has received from you. To refuse so energetically as you have just done, you must have some other reason. Perhaps you would not like to

tell me what it is before my daughter: you shall tell me" —

"At once!" cried Cesarine, leaving the room impetuously.

"Yes, at once," repeated M. Dietrich, closing the door behind her. "In deaing with Cesarine we must hide no sparks under the cinders. Are you afraid of being accused of ambition and shrewdness?"

"Yes, sir: that is the first thing."

"You are above" —

"No one is above any thing. Who knows me well enough to exonerate me from all premeditation and intrigue? Very few people. I am in too subordinate a position to have many true friends. The favor to my nephew would cause a great deal of jealousy. Neither of us would receive without mortification the malevolent comments of your acquaintances, — that is, all Paris and all France. No, no! our reputation is too precious to be compromised thus."

"If our connection is so extensive, it will be easy for us to let the real truth be known; and indeed it is known already. Not one of the many people whom you have met here will have the slightest doubt that your action has been honorable in the matter. As for Paul, he will arouse jealousy of course; but who would not by marrying Cesarine? If any one should be driven off by such a fear as that, he would be depriving himself of all power, of all success, of all happiness. Your obstacle is chimerical, and one that should be trampled under foot. Tell me the other causes of your objection."

"There is but one other; but you must acknowledge its weight. Your daughter and my nephew are totally incompatible in character. Cesarine has but one passion, — to make every body yield to her; Paul but one, — to yield to no one."

"That is indeed serious; but who can say that the contrast will not bring happiness to both? Cesarine, conquered by love, forced to respect her husband, and accepting him as her equal, will come back to real life, and will alarm us no more by the excess of her independence. Paul, softened by happiness, will learn to yield to tenderness, and to believe in it."

"And suppose this result can never be brought about, but only contests, estrangements, and perhaps separation! No, M. Dietrich: let us not try to bring these two extremes together. Be alarmed for your child, as I am alarmed for mine. Heroic remedies may be good in desperate cases, but this is nothing more than a passing fancy. One hour ago, if I had asked Cesarine to marry Paul, she would have died of laughing. It was only in the face of my reproaches that she, feeling guilty of a grave fault, imagined this passion to justify herself. One hour hence go to her, and tell her that you will consent no more than I to this marriage, and you will relieve her of a great perplexity, I engage."

"Very likely. I will soon see. But let us leave her time to take alarm at her own flightiness. I am altogether of your opinion, except upon the point of your false pride. If there were no other obstacle, I would set at work to overcome it. I am a man of principle, and believe it proper and praiseworthy to ally poverty to riches when that poverty is worthy of esteem and respect. I consider M. Paul Gilbert's poverty a virtue of the highest order. I assure you, that, in inviting him to my house, I thought that possibly he might please my daughter; a-

I am not in the least alarmed about either of them."

When M. Dietrich left me, I felt completely upset and besieged with doubts and scruples. Had I really the right to close to Paul a future so brilliant, a fortune so unhoped-for? This child, whose stoicism had given me so much anxiety, I could make a free man, influential, happy perhaps; for who could say that Mlle. Dietrich would not be cured of her pride by the miracle of love? I was all of a tremble, like one who should see a paradise beyond a yawning chasm, but lacked for the moment the courage to leap across.

X.

I DID not see Cesarine again until dinner-time. She was as calm and as amiable as if nothing serious had passed between us. M. Dietrich took dinner that day at some embassy or other. Cesarine teased her Aunt Helmina at dessert about the greenness of her dress and the redness of her hair; but when we passed into the drawing-room she ceased laughing all at once, and led me aside. "It appears," she said, "that neither my father nor you are willing to pay the least respect to my desire in this matter, and that I am no longer to be permitted to make my own choice. Papa has been very obliging, but, after all, very firm. That indicates that he will yield completely whenever he sees that I am firm also. He was not able to conceal from me that all he wished was that I should take time for reflection. As for you, my dear, it will be for him to induce you to revoke your sentence. I shall charge him with that duty."

"And, in these nice arrangements, what disposition do you make of my nephew's will?"

"Oh! as to your nephew, it will be for me to inspire him with confidence. It is an interesting task, which I reserve to myself. But he is away now; and this respite gives me time to convince father and you of the serious character of my resolution."

"How do you know that my nephew is absent?"

"Oh! I have my private sources of information. He went to Leipsic this morning. I am going to turn this absence to profit by putting an end at once and forever to the hopes of M. de Rivonnière."

"Then you have written to him again?"

"No: I sent word by Dubois, his old valet, who brought me a bouquet from the marquis, to come and take a cup of tea with us this evening, very early; because I am still weary after the ball, and wish to retire early. He will be here soon. Hark! he is just ringing the bell."

"It was to be alone with him, then, that you wished to dine with your aunt and myself only to-day?"

"Exactly. Don't you hear his carriage? See if it is he! I don't wish to receive anybody else."

"Must I leave you alone together?"

"No, indeed. I have never admitted him to a *tête-à-tête* that I know of. My aunt will not be present. I have asked her not. But I wish you would remain."

"I am very much inclined to let you carry out alone to the end your imprudent and capricious schemes."

"Then you would compromise me!"

The marquis was announced. I took my work and remained.

"I wanted to speak to you," said Cesarine to him. "Last evening, at

the ball, you cut a sorry figure. Did you know it?"

"I know it; and since I do not make any complaint" —

"I ought not to complain of you? But I do complain of the part of cruel sovereign which you compel me to play. Some remedy must be applied to this state of things, which troubles my father, and disgusts me also."

"The remedy is very simple."

"Yes: I suppose you mean by accepting you as a husband. But as that cannot be, what then?"

"You love me no more, then, than on the first day of our acquaintance?"

"Indeed, I love you with a good and loyal friendship; but I will not be your wife. You know that. I have told you so a hundred times."

"You have, nevertheless, always added a word which you omit to-day. You have always said, 'I will not *yet* marry.'"

"Then, in your opinion, I have given you hope?"

"Very little, I confess; but you have never forbidden me to hope."

"To day I forbid you."

"It is a little late."

"How so? What sacrifices have you made for me?"

"That of my self-respect. I have consented to parade before the eyes of every one my devotion to you, and to act as a man who expects no reward. Friendship for you has made me find this rôle a very pleasant one; and now you tell me it makes me ridiculous. It is your right to do so; but what remedy do you offer me?"

"You must be in love with me no longer, and you must tell the world that you have never been enamoured of me. I will help you in causing people to believe it. I will say, that from the very first we agreed not to spoil friendship by love; that it is I who have retained you as an intimate friend. If any one rallies you on our relations in my presence, I will reply with so much energy, that my words shall carry authority."

"I know that you are capable of what is impossible; but I do not fear bantering at all. There is no one more sensitive than a vain man. I have no vanity. Whenever the benevolent pity of which I am the object becomes disagreeable and offensive, I shall know how to put an end to the bad jokes. Don't try to throw a veil over my defeat. I accept it as a brave man, who has done nothing to be ashamed of, and who will not lie."

"Then, my friend, you must cease your visits here; for I will not bear the reputation of being a flirting coquette."

"You can never avoid it. Every woman who draws men about her without favoring any one is condemned to that reputation. What does it matter to you? Bear it bravely, as I take my burden of passing for one of your victims."

"You take the better *rôle* my very dear friend; but I refuse the other, the bad."

"In what respect is it bad? A woman of your beauty and accomplishments has a perfect right to be difficult, and to accept homage from many."

"You want me to appear to be a heartless woman?"

"You will be adored and praised so much the more: it is the law of society and of its opinion. Take the attitude which is suited to one who wishes to preserve her independence, at whatever price, without condemning herself to solitude."

"You are giving me bad advice. I see that you want me to be egotistical. My society is agreeable to you, my prattle amuses you. You have no reason to be jealous, being the best treated of all my suitors. You wish the relation to continue; and you lay plans to drive away from me all these people who demand that a woman shall be, above all, sincere and good."

"I begin to see your idea more clearly. You wish to marry!"

"Who will prevent me?"

"Not I. I have no rights in the matter."

"You acknowledge that?"

"I am a man of honor."

"Well, give me your hand: you are an excellent friend."

The Marquis de Rivonnière kissed the hand of Cesarine with a respect the calm abnegation of which astonished me. I did not suppose that he was so submissive, and still bending over my embroidery I watched him attentively.

"Then," he resumed, after a moment of silence, "you are going to make a choice."

"Have I said so?"

"It seems to me so. Why should you not tell me, since I am and remain your friend?"

"Indeed! If that were so, why should I not tell you?"

"Say it, and fear nothing. Do I look like a man who is likely to blow out his brains?"

"No, indeed. You would show by such an act that you had none."

"True; and I have brains. But one may be philosophical in such matters, or not. Come, tell me whom you have chosen."

I believed it to be my duty to prevent Cesarine from committing a serious indiscretion; and, addressing the marquis, I said, "She cannot tell you, for the simple reason that she herself does not know whom she has chosen."

"That is true," replied Cesarine, whom my troubled look warned of danger: "I do not yet know him."

M. de Rivonnière seemed relieved. He recognized one of the whims of Cesarine, and no longer took the matter seriously. He even laughed at her indecision, and refused to see in it any thing cruel towards himself; for of all those who were spoiling this very much spoiled child, he was the most indulgent and the most delighted to spare her every disappointment.

"But we have not yet concluded the treaty," she said. "It is now necessary that you should cease your visits or cease to love me."

"Permit me to see you, and do not be disturbed by my hopeless passion for you. I will overcome it, or will at least render it not an obstacle for you."

Cesarine began to find the marquis too willing. If he had premeditated his *rôle*, he could not have played it better. I saw that she was surprised and piqued. She had prepared herself for an angry scene, or for the mortification of the marquis: she found him a true man of the world, in the chivalrous and delicate sense of the term. It seemed to him that he had obtained the victory by her very tactics of yielding. "Go away now," said I to her aside: "I will undertake to find out what he thinks."

She retired at once, saying that she was tired, and taking the hand of her slave coldly enough. "I beg permission to remain a moment longer," said M. de Rivonnière as soon as we were alone. "You must tell me the name of the happy mortal."

"There is no happy mortal," I replied. "M. Dietrich has simply re-

proached his daughter for the situation in which her caprice has placed you. She said she would marry to put an end to it."

"Whom? Me?"

"No: the Emperor of China, — or what she really did say was not more serious than that."

"You wish to deceive me, Mlle. de Nermont, or else you really do not know the truth. Mlle. Dietrich is certainly in love with some one."

"Whom do you suspect, then?"

"I do not know; but I will know. She disappeared from the ball-room soon after sending a note by Bertrand, her confidential servant. I followed her, sought her, lost sight of her. I found her again coming out of a mysterious passage. She took me nervously by the arm, and ordered me to take her in to dance. I could not see the person whom she left behind, or whom she had just dismissed; but she had to laugh, and to rally me on my uneasiness, because she was so uneasy herself."

"Have you any particular person in view in your suspicions?"

"I suspect every one. There is not a man among all her acquaintance who may not be smitten with her."

"You seemed determined not to be jealous of whoever might be preferred to you."

"Jealous? I? I will not be so long; for the person whom she would marry" —

"Well, what?"

"Well, what! I shall kill him, of course."

"What do you say?"

"I say what I mean, and what I will do."

"You speak seriously?"

"You will see," he replied, wiping away with his handkerchief the perspiration that stood on his face. His fine, delicate face had not a wrinkle or a frown; but his lips were pale and firmly set.

I was frightened. "What!" said I: "you are so vindictive as that? — you, whom I believed so generous?"

"I am generous coolly and on reflection; but when angry, — I have told you so already, — I am not myself."

"You must reflect, then."

"No: not before I have revenged myself; it is impossible."

"Does your anger last several days?"

"Weeks; months, perhaps."

"Then it is hate which you cherish, without making an effort against it. And you were just now boasting of being a philosopher."

"Just now I lied, you lied, Mlle. Dietrich lied too. We were playing at diplomacy, after the manner of society. Now here we are in an atmosphere of truth. She is in love with another man than myself, and cares for me not the least in the world. You prudently conceal his name from me, but you understand very well my anger; and, for my part, I feel the blood rushing to my brain in great angry waves. Whatever of savageness there is in man or in an animal reduces to nothing the fine maxims and the beautiful sentiments of civilized life. That is my case. Any thing you can say in the language of civilization is wholly unsuited to me; and I do not understand it. It is useless. For three years now I have loved Mlle. Dietrich. I have tried to forget her, to love some one else. The other I have sacrificed to her, and have thus been guilty of a very bad action; for I have seduced a pure and loving girl more beautiful than Cesarine, and better. I do not regret her, because

I get accustomed to your scolding? Well, tell me, you ugly thing, do you suppose that I could become tender if I wished?"

"No: it is too late."

"You do not admit, then, that a new, unknown sentiment, love for example, can awaken the dormant instincts of my heart?"

"No: they would have awakened before now. You have not a maternal soul. You never loved either your birds or your dolls."

"I am not womanly enough, you think?"

"No, nor manly enough, either."

"Well," said she, rising rather angrily, "I will try to be manly enough hereafter. I am going to lead the life of a boy. I will hunt, groom the horses, interest myself in stables and in politics, treat men as companions, and women as children. I will not attempt to reveal the glory of my sex. I will scoff at every thing, cause people to talk about me, and will nevertheless be interested in nothing and nobody. Such are the men of my times. I wonder if their stupidity makes them happy!"

She rung the bell, called for her horse, and, in spite of my remonstrances, went to parade herself in the Bois in the eyes of all Paris, escorted only by her two devoted servants, the famous Bertrand, and a groom. It was the first time that she had ever gone out thus without her father or myself. It is true, that, as I did not ride, I could accompany her only in a carriage, and as M. Dietrich, had very little time to devote to her as a cavalier, she was virtually almost excluded from indulgence in this her favorite amusement. She had declared to us before, that, as soon as she attained her majority, she intended to make as free use of her liberty as a young English or American girl would do. But we had hoped that she would not display her eccentricity too quickly. She wished to launch herself on the world, however, and had done so; and now she had gone out in her carriage, and was going to drive about unaccompanied. This caprice did not injure her nevertheless, although it made her talked about. She acted with so much pride and resoluteness, that she triumphed over the doubts and the fears of the severest critics. I was in dread lest she should take a fancy to walk alone through the streets. She restrained herself from that, and indeed, protected by her connections, by her fine bearing, by her general appearance and good taste, and by the notoriety which she had already established, she was running risks, only if people suspected her of running them, which was impossible.

This precocious liberty, to which her father dared offer no opposition in the frame of mind in which he found her, intoxicated Cesarine at first like new wine, and made her forget her fancy for my nephew. She put away from herself at the same time all thoughts of marriage.

XI.

PAUL returned from Germany, and my perplexity revived with his arrival. I did not want him ever to see Cesarine again; but how was I to tell him not to come any more to our house, without confessing to him that I feared an assault more serious than the first upon his peace? Cesarine seemed cured of her folly; but how far might one trust one's self with her? And if, unknown to us, she set a snare to capture and marry him, would he not be

dazzled so much, were it only for a few days, as to fall into the trap, only to suffer all his days from a deception so terrible?

I determined to tell him all the truth; and I anticipated his visit by going to see him at his office. He had a little private room at the store. I went there at seven o'clock in the morning, well knowing, that, instead of resting after his journey, he would go to his work. When I had confessed my fears to him, without making any allusion to the threats of M. de Rivonnière, whom he might, perhaps, wish to defy, he re-assured me by an outburst of laughter. "I have not the least inclination towards marriage," he said; "and all the fascinations of Mlle. Dietrich would be entirely ineffectual to lead me that way. I marry a frivolous woman! Give my time, my life, my future, my heart, my honor, into the keeping of a headstrong and ungovernable girl, who stakes her own existence on the turn of a copper! Don't be afraid, aunt: your marvellous pupil is disagreeable to me. I have told you so before; and I repeat it. Shall I do violence to my own inclination in order to share her fortune? My whole life gives the lie to such a suspicion."

"Yes, my boy: yes, indeed. It isn't your ambition which I fear, but some kind of dizziness of imagination or sense."

"Rest easy, my aunt. I have a mistress as young as Mlle. Dietrich, and more beautiful."

"What! You have a mistress!"

"Well, what of it? Are you surprised?"

"You never told me before."

"You never asked me."

"I should not have dared. It would almost be immodest for mother and son to talk on that subject."

"Then I had better have said nothing about it now. We will talk no more of it."

"Indeed, I am, on the whole, relieved to hear of it. Cesarine's great liking for you has arisen because she believes you to be as pure as an angel."

"Let her know that I am not pure at all."

"But how do you find time to be with a mistress?"

"It is because I give her all the time which I have at my disposal that I do not go into company, and lose not a minute that I do not devote to my work or to her."

"Indeed! Are you happy?"

"Very happy, aunt."

"Does she love you well?"

"No, not well, but very much."

"That is to say that she does not make you happy?"

"Do you wish to know all?"

"Of course, since I know a little."

"Well, listen then. Two years ago, — two years and some months, — I was going from my employer's store to the house of another publisher, who lives, in summer, in the country on the banks of the Seine. After leaving the railroad-station, there is some distance to be made on foot along the river, under the willows. Approaching a clump of trees unusually dense, which juts into the river, I saw in the water a drowning woman. I rescued her, and carried her into a mean hut which was nearest at hand. I was received by a peasant woman, who uttered loud cries when she recognized her daughter. 'Ah, the unhappy child!' she screamed: 'she tried to kill herself! I was sure that would be the end of it all.'

"'But,' said I, 'she is not dead. Look out for her! Rub her as quick as you can, and hard. I will go and fetch a doctor. Where is there one near here?'

"'There,' said she, pointing to a white house opposite hers, but on the other side of the river. 'Get into the first boat you can find.'

"I ran towards the boats. There was no person anywhere to be seen. The boats were chained and padlocked. I was already wet from my plunge after the girl. I cast off my coat, which might be in my way, and swam the river, which is not broad. I went to the doctor's house; he was absent. I inquired for another. They directed me to the next village; and I again cast myself into the river. I returned to the house of the washerwoman, — for the mother of her whom I had saved was a laundress. I wished to know if there was still time to call a physician. I found the doctor already there: he had been passing, and was called in. 'The poor girl has got off with a cold bath,' said he. 'She has already recovered. You were just in time. You are very wet, and will get cold. Come with me after I have looked once more at the patient.' He made me get into his carriage in spite of myself; and then across the bridge we went to his house, where he insisted on my changing my clothes. In five minutes we were there. The doctor's wife having been told the state of the case by her husband in two words, made me go into the kitchen, where there was a roaring fire, brought me a dressing-gown, trousers, slippers, and a bowl of hot wine. I never was so coddled in my life before.

"I was hardly dressed in these borrowed garments, when the doctor came and told me that the drowned girl was getting along nicely, and declared that I should not go away until I had dined, and my own clothes were dried. But all these details are needless. I was in the hands of excellent people, who told me much about Marguerite, — that's the name of the young thing who tried to drown herself.

"She was sixteen. She was born in the hut to which I had just carried her, where she had shared hard work with her mother, while learning from a neighbor a trade much more easy and better suited to her delicate constitution. She had become a very nice worker in lace. She was a good and gentle girl, industrious, and not a flirt; but she had the misfortune to be very beautiful, and to attract much attention. Her mother sent her out to work at the shops in the village and the neighborhood. She had met, the year before, a handsome student, who was strolling about the country, and who watched her secretly several days. Then he spoke to her, coaxed her, and she followed him. 'You must know,' the doctor said, 'that she was very badly treated by her mother, who is a very bad woman, and would have liked nothing better than to speculate upon her daughter's virtue, but made a great outcry when her daughter disappeared without giving her any chance to get profit out of the elopement.

"'At the end of about two months, the student, who had carried Marguerite to Paris or to the suburbs, — no one knows where, — went away to the country to marry, abandoning the poor girl, after having offered her money, which she refused. She returned to her mother, who would have pardoned her if she had brought any money, and who loaded her with blows when she heard that Marguerite had accepted nothing.

"'Since this sad adventure,' — remember that it is the doctor who says all this, — 'Marguerite has conducted herself prudently and virtuously, working nobly, submitting to all reproaches and sneers with perfect sweetness. My wife has really taken her into friendship, and has given her work. I have taken care of her; for her disappointment made her sick. Fortunately for her she was not *enceinte*, — unfortunately too, perhaps; for it would have attached her to life to have a child to raise. For some weeks she has been in greater distress than ever. Her mother has tried to get her to sell herself to an old libertine, whom I know very well, but whom I will not name. He is my richest patient, and passes for a great philanthropist. The persecution had become so irritating, that Marguerite lost control of herself, and tried to kill herself to-day, to escape the bitter lot which pursued her. I don't know whether you have rendered her a service in saving her, but you have done your duty; and truly you have rescued a good girl, who would have been honest if she had had a good mother.'

"'Will you not offer your house to her? or will you not at least find some place for her?'

"'I have done the best I could, but her mother would not allow any one to tear her prey away from her. Besides, my position in the community does not permit me to engage in kidnapping a minor.'

"'Then what will become of the unhappy girl?'

"'She will be ruined, or she will commit suicide.'

"Such was the conclusion to which the doctor had come. He was kind-hearted; but he had seen so much evil and misery, that he could resign himself to see people wronged, suffering, and dying.

"The next day I went to see Marguerite with my plans all formed. I found her alone, still pale and weak. Her mother was away making the rounds of her customers. The poor girl wept when she saw me. I wanted to make her promise, as my reward, that she would renounce all suicidal plans. She bowed her head, sobbing, and said not a word.

"'I know your story,' said I to her. 'I am aware of your intolerable position here. I pity you, I honor you, and I wish to save you. But I am not rich, and can offer you but a very humble condition. I am acquainted with an honest working-woman, pleasant and kind, and not very young. I will place you in her house, and for a very moderate sum, which I will furnish, she will lodge and feed you until you shall be able to earn your living by work. Will you accept?'

"She refused. I supposed that she was determined at last to yield to the infamous requirements of her mother; but I was mistaken. She supposed that I wished to make her my mistress. 'If I went with you,' said she, 'you would not marry me?'

"'No, certainly not,' I replied. 'I don't intend to marry.'

"'Never?"

"'Not under ten or twelve years. I shall not have the means to support a family.'

"'But if you should find a rich wife?'

"'I shall not find her.'

"'How do you know that?'

"If I should find her, she would have to wait until I was rich also. I will owe nothing to any one.'

"'And what should I do for you, if you took me away from here?'

"'Nothing.'

"'Really, nothing? You would not even require gratitude?'

"'Not the least. I am not in love with you, beautiful as you are. I have no time for a passion; and, to tell you the whole truth, I feel myself capable of a passion only for a woman whose first love I shall be. To take advantage of your beauty for my own pleasure, especially in the condition in which I find you, would seem to me a crime, and an abuse of confidence. I offer you an honest, but a laborious and a very precarious life. Your mother proffers riches, laziness, and shame. Think the matter over. Here is my address. Let no one see it; for, if you escape from the authority of your mother, you must conceal your hiding-place. If you have confidence in me, come and find me.'

"'But why, in Heaven's name,' she cried, all in a tremble from emotion, 'are you so good to me?'

"'Because I have prevented you from killing yourself, and I owe it to you to render life possible for you.'

"I left her. The next day she came to my room. I conducted her to the house of the working-woman where she was to have an asylum, and did not see her again for a week.

"When I had time to go and see her I found her at work. Her hostess praised her very much. Marguerite said that she was happy; and several months passed only to convince me of her good intentions and her good conduct. She worked rapidly and well; went out only with her new friend, and showed a kindness and love for her which were very touching. I was contented with having succeeded in doing her a little benefit, which is more difficult than is generally supposed."

"Then," said I, "you have now become enamoured of her?"

"No," replied Paul. "She began to love me, to exaggerate my kindness, to take me for a god, to weep and pine away at my indifference. When I would question her, I saw that she despaired of pleasing me.

"'You do please me,' said I; 'but that is not the question. If you had been a wanton, I might have made love to you desperately. But you deserve better than to be my mistress; and you cannot be my wife, as you well know.'

"'I do know it too well,' she answered. 'You are a proud and unstained man. You could not marry a ruined girl. But, if I were your mistress, would you despise me?'

"'No, of course not. So far as I know you, I should have for you the most sincere regard and the most stable friendship.'

"'And that would last?'—

"'As long as possible, perhaps always.'

"'You will promise nothing absolutely?'

"'Nothing absolutely; and I may add that your lot will not be more desirable than it is now. I have no home. I live in poverty. I should not see you all the day. I would agree that you should not lack for the necessities of life; but I could procure you neither luxuries, nor idleness, nor fine dresses.'

"'I accept that position, then,' said she: 'as I can work, I will not be any expense to you. Your friendship is all I ask. I know very well that I deserve no more; but so that I see you every day I shall be happy.'

"That is the way I formed my connection with Marguerite, — a tie slender in appearance, but strong in reality, for — but I have told you enough for one day, my dear aunt! I hear

the bell, which means that I am needed on business. If you wish to know all, come to-morrow to my house."

"To your house? Then you now have a house?"

"Yes: I have rented a little suite in the Rue d'Assas, where Marguerite and Madame Feron, the working-woman who at first received her, and is attached to her, work together. I go there in the evening only; but to-morrow we have a holiday afternoon, and, if you wish to come there at one o'clock, you will find me at home."

XII.

THE next day, at the appointed hour, I was at the number of the Rue d'Assas which he had written on his card. I asked for Madame Feron, and was directed to the third story. Paul met me on the landing, holding in his arms a big boy about a year old, fresh as a rose, handsome as his mother, who stood pale and fearful in the doorway. Paul put his boy in my arms, saying, "Kiss him and bless him, aunt: now you know the whole story."

I was affected and displeased. The rude revelation of a secret so well kept rendered more difficult the future which I had prepared in my own mind for my nephew, and which had never included as among the possibilities a mistress and an illegitimate son.

The child was so handsome, and the kiss of infancy is so powerful, that I took the little Pierre upon my knee as soon as I entered the room, and pressed him to my heart without being able to speak a word. Marguerite sobbed at my feet. "Kiss her too," said Paul. "If she did not deserve it, I would not have asked you here."

I kissed Marguerite, and examined her. Paul had told me the truth: she was more beautiful in the modest dress of a *grisette* than Cesarine in all the blaze of diamonds. The misfortunes of her life had given to her features, and to her perfect form, an expression and a *pose* which interested one in her at once; and every moment increased the interest. I was surprised that she had not inspired Paul with a sentiment more quick than friendship: little by little I thought I discovered the cause. Marguerite was a true plebeian, with the qualities and the faults which indicate a rustic education. She passed from extreme timidity to a too expansive confidence. She was not one of those exceptional natures which contact with a superior mind transforms rapidly: she spoke as she had always spoken; she had not even the intelligent suavity of the Parisian working-woman. She was contemplative rather than reflective; and if there were moments when emotion drove her to striking and powerful expressions, for the greater part of the time her language was vulgar, and such as is commonly employed to express erroneous or frivolous ideas.

Madame Feron was introduced to me, the widow of a sub-officer killed in the Crimea, in the possession of a little pension, which, joined to her earnings as a clear-starcher, gave her a modest support. She helped Marguerite in her family cares, and took the child occasionally to the Luxembourg, accepting for her loss of time only her free rent. I was taken through the suite of apartments, very small indeed, but light and airy, and fitted up with the nicest propriety. The two women had separate apartments; a larger room than either was used for a sitting and reception room; the dining-room and kitchen were microscopic. I

noticed also a library of considerable size, to which Paul had brought a few books, a bureau, a sofa-bed, and some little statuettes. "You work here, then," said I.

"Sometimes, when Monsieur, my son, is cutting his teeth, and prevents me from sleeping. But it was not to give myself the luxury of a library that I fitted up this room."

"Why, then?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"Why, it was for you, my little aunt. It is our prettiest chamber, and the best furnished. It is out of the way; and you might sleep or work here without hearing the squalling of Monsieur Pierre."

"You desire, then, that I should come and live with you?"

"No: you are better off at the Dietrichs. But you are not at home there; and I have always told you that a caprice of the lovely Cesarine might make you sensible of the fact. I wanted to have a home to offer you at any time, were it only for a few days. I do not want it to be said that my aunt could leave the house where she dwells, in a carriage, without knowing where she could go, or where she could leave her trunks, and be doomed to the solitude of a room at a hotel. This is your domain, aunty; and here are your friends, — two devoted women, and a valet, who, under the pretext of being your nephew, will serve you with all his might."

I embraced my dear child with deep feeling. The whole family accompanied me to the door; and I did not go away without promising to come again soon. It was agreed that I should see Paul only at his house, and upon the days when he was at liberty. If, on one hand, I had been alarmed at seeing him at twenty-four bound in a *liaison* which his position as a father would render it difficult to break off, on the other hand, I saw an end of both the caprices of Cesarine, and the vengeance of the marquis; and I was relieved of the more immediate and pressing anxiety.

Cesarine immediately perceived my serenity, as she had before observed my anxiety. "What now?" she asked as soon as I returned. "You have been gone a long time, and you have been weeping."

I denied it. "You are deceiving me," said she. "Your nephew may have returned sick perhaps? But he is out of danger; I see that in your eyes."

"If my nephew had been ever so little ill, though out of all danger, I should not have returned at all. Your romance is improbable."

"I will form another, ten more, if necessary; but I will find out the truth. There has been a drama in your life, as they say, this morning."

"Well, perhaps!" I replied, determined to put an end to her fancy for Paul once for all. "My nephew has given me a great surprise to-day. He has revealed to me that he is married."

"Oh, what a good joke!" cried Cesarine, bursting into laughter, but at the same time turning very pale. "You have only invented this story to turn me from him. Could he marry without your consent?"

"Certainly. He is of age, and not under my guardianship."

"And he had never before let you into the secret, this model nephew of yours!"

"In a love-match, one consults nobody, if there is reason to fear the displeasure of friends. Fortunately he has made a good choice. I have seen his wife to-day."

"Is she pretty?"

"She is not only pretty, but handsome."

"More handsome than myself, I suppose?"

"Unquestionably."

"What stories you are telling!"

"I have kissed their son, a very lovely child."

"Their son! The son of your nephew! Is your nephew old enough to have *a son?* You mean *a brat*, of course!"

"Well, say a brat. He is a year old."

"Pauline, swear that you are not mocking me!"

"Well, I swear it."

"Then it is all over with me," said she. "There is my last illusion vanished like the others." And turning away, the strange girl buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

I looked at her in astonishment, asking myself if it were not a dramatic trick to soften me, and make me retract a lie. Seeing that I would not speak, she arose impetuously and left the room. I followed her to her room, where M. Dietrich, wondering why she did not come down to dinner, soon joined us. Cesarine would not be questioned. She was really in earnest, and wept true tears.

"Father," said she, "console me if you can, for Pauline is very indifferent to my grief. Her nephew is married! a good while ago, too, for he is a father! I have been indulging in a very absurd romance; but do not laugh at me, it is a very sad one too. That astonishes you; but why? Have I not told you that he was the only man whom I could love? He had united in himself intelligence, firmness, dignity of character, and purity of morals, which I had sought for in vain among men of the world, beginning with the marquis. I did not think — stupid girl that I was! — that a young man can remain pure only by marrying very young, and by marrying for love. Now I may search in vain all my life for a man who has not the stain of immorality upon him. I shall never find such a one, unless it may be some idiotic infant, whose companion I should blush to be; for now I know life and the world. There is no mean between silliness and wickedness. Father, take me away; let us go far, very far from here, — to America, to the savages."

"Is that the best thing to do?" laughed M. Dietrich. "Do you propose that we shall begin a search for the 'last of the Mohicans'?"

He would not take her despair as a serious matter. She forced him to believe in it by a fit of hysterics, which she feigned at first, and which afterwards became real, — a trick possible to all wilful women and spoiled children. They fidget, cry out, manifest their emotions in convulsions, which are not exactly pretended, but which might be stifled and held back if they were absolutely real; soon the veritable convulsion manifests itself, and punishes the will which has invoked it, making itself master of the body, and throwing the person into a violent fit. Nature carries retributive justice with herself, and inflicts immediate punishment for the evil which the individual would do himself.

We had to put her to bed, and dine without her, late and sadly. I told the whole truth to M. Dietrich. He did not approve of the lie which I had told Cesarine, and was astonished to see me — for the first time undoubtedly in my life, he said — using means that were not in strict accordance with truth. I told him then of the three

of M. de Rivonnière, and confessed that I was so frightened by them that I could have done any thing to preserve my nephew's life. M. Dietrich did not attach much importance to the anger of the marquis. He objected that M. de Rivonnière was a man of honor and intelligence; that in his anger he might, perhaps, lose his head for a moment, but that it was impossible that he should not return to reason in twenty-four hours.

"So," said I, "you will go and undeceive Cesarine, and let her know that my nephew is still free? You will deceive her more than I have, for he is not free."

He promised me to say nothing.

"I have not told the lie," he said: "I will pretend that I am your dupe; and I can do so the more readily, because I cannot admit that a young man, in such a *liaison* as his present one, ought to think of marriage."

Cesarine was completely broken down for several days; then she resumed her active and gay life, and even appeared, by her manner, to encourage all the suitors who flocked about her. Every morning there was an assault by bouquets at the door of the house, every day an assault of visits as soon as the door was opened.

I saw Paul and Marguerite from time to time in the Rue d'Assas. I was confirmed in my belief that their association rendered neither of them happy, and that the child alone received the love and occupied the mind of Paul. Marguerite was a good creature, notwithstanding the fault committed in her youth; but that slip was not the less an obstacle to the marriage which she desired, and which Paul, still more strongly than I, knew to be impossible. One day they quarrelled in my presence, and called me in as a judge between them.

"If I had not had a child," said Marguerite, "I should never have thought of marriage, for I well know that I do not deserve it; but since I have my Pierre, I am troubled about the future. I tell myself that he will despise his mother by and by, when he is able to understand that she was not deemed worthy to be married. It makes me so sad to think of it, that there are moments when I restrain myself from loving him, so as to become used to sorrow. Ah! I did not understand at the time the wickedness of what I did. I found my mother cruel and full of reproaches; I found Paul good, and having no reproaches to make. But now I am a mother, and I detest myself. I know very well that Paul will never abandon his son, — there is no danger of that; he loves the boy too well, and he is too honest a man for that. But what would become of me if my own son should turn against me?"

"He will love and respect you always," said Paul. "I will answer to you for that, at least, unless by your imprudent complaints you teach him what he ought not to know."

"Then it is all right, is it, to conceal from children that their parents are not married? In order to carry out that deception, it is necessary that you never leave me; and who is going to answer for it that you will not marry another?"

I thought it my duty to interpose. "It is at least certain," said I to Marguerite, "that it has become very difficult for my nephew to make such an honorable and advantageous marriage as a man in his position ought. The sacrifice which he has made to you of his liberty, of his future perhaps,

ought to suffice, my poor child. Remember that thus far all the sacrifices have been on his side, and that you haven't the right to demand more with good grace."

"You are right," she replied, kissing my hands: "you are severe, but you are good. You tell me the truth. He is very gentle, very proud, and very tender, so that I sometimes forget what I owe to him, — my life even!"

She was conquered. She had a good disposition, devoted to justice, but a mind too little developed to enable her to find her way without help and counsel. When she understood her errors, she regretted them sincerely; but she fell into them again, as do those people generally who have not been disciplined by a good primary education. She had instincts both selfish and generous, which she could not distinguish from each other, and which carried her wide of the mark quite frequently. Paul was already a little tired of her purposeless uneasiness, her unfounded jealousy; in a word, of the tendency to injustice and recrimination which a fallen woman seldom knows how to overcome. I went out to walk with him that day, and reproached him for treating Marguerite too much like a child. "Since this unfortunate connection exists," said I, "and you believe it to be your duty never to break it off, try to make it a little less dolorous. Elevate the ideas of this poor woman, and try to smooth the asperities of her character. It seems to me that you do not go to work the right way to make her understand and bless her lot, rather than to deplore it."

"I have said all that any one can say," he replied; "but every day I must begin again. Boys improve and progress all the time, — I see that in my son already; but girls, whose development has come from their ruin, learn nothing. Marguerite will learn nothing; it must be my duty to bear with her faults. What she cannot do for herself, I will do for her; and I will work for it as patiently and as gently as I can. Be sure there is no other remedy: it is painful and aggravating sometimes; but who can boast of being perfectly happy in his domestic affairs? I might be legitimately married to a jealous woman, just as I might be towards Marguerite a suspicious and tyrannical lover. Believe me, aunt, in this bad world in which our work and worry pass for happiness, we ought to call any tolerable situation a happy one; and there is no real misfortune except that which crushes or overwhelms our powers. If I had no mistress, I should be compelled to suppress affection, and seek only pleasure. Women who can give me only that are repugnant to me. It is well for me that I have a companion who loves me, who is faithful to me, and for whom I can have some affection when, the effervescence of youth having subsided, we find ourselves still in each other's company. It is worth while for me to endure some caprices, to pardon a little ingratitude, and to disregard some symptoms of impatience. And when I look at that fine boy whom she has given me, who is mine, whom she has nursed and cradled on her bosom through long sleepless nights, I feel really married, closely bound to my family, and contented with my lot."

Paul was at liberty that day. I took him to dine with me at a restaurant, and we chatted for a long time. I also had a holiday: M. Dietrich had gone to superintend some operation at Mireval; Cesarine had probably dined with her cousins.

I returned home at nine o'clock, and

was astonished to find her dining alone in her own room. "I only came back at eight," she explained. "I did not dine with my cousins because I did not feel in the mood to hear their chatter. I went out quite late, and told my aunt not to accompany me. Now, don't scold because I didn't come back until night, and came alone. It was so lovely and so mild, that I took the fancy to ride in a carriage around the lake at a time when the drive was deserted. The time when everybody is at dinner is decidedly the most agreeable to go to the Bois de Boulogne. But where did you dine? I expected to find you at home when I got back."

"I dined with my nephew."

"And with *his wife?*" she asked, looking at me with a singular expression. "Do you know that he has deceived you, and that he isn't married at all?"

"It is just the same," I replied. "He is perhaps bound more strongly than if he were married."

"Bound is the word, eh? I see that you are going to be frank with me."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Nor what you are saying either, my good Pauline. You are getting into deep water; but you need not. I know the whole truth."

"What! what do you know?"

"Listen. Before going to the Bois to think the matter over, I went and made the acquaintance of the beautiful Marguerite."

"You are joking!"

"You shall see. I knew that every evening your Paul left the store to pass the night at the house of one Madame Feron, who rented, or was supposed to rent, a suite of apartments in the Rue d'Assas. I knew, also, that your nephew went there very seldom in the daytime; and, as it was only four o'clock, I determined to learn the truth to-day."

"Why to-day?"

"Because M. Salvioni, the noble Italian who follows me everywhere, and whom my Aunt Helmina patronizes, made me yesterday, at the opera, a very impassioned declaration, during the ballet of 'Masaniello.' He is very handsome, this descendant of the Strozzis. He is witty and poetical, and speaks with a little foreign accent that is agreeable. He would suit me if I could love him; but I thought again of your nephew: and then I promised to give him a definite answer in two days, which will be to-morrow. It was therefore necessary that I should know to-day whether you hadn't been telling me a little story to confuse me. I asked for Madame Feron, and was shown into a little kennel, where a big baby was playing upon the knees of a very pretty woman. Bertrand climbed the stairs with me; and, as there was no waiting-room to the suite, he had to remain outside on the landing. I entered boldly, and asked Madame Feron for Madame Paul Gilbert. Madame Feron opened the door; and she was too stupid and too old for me to suppose that she was Paul's wife. She appeared embarrassed by my request; and, while she was hesitating, Marguerite herself arose, with her brat in her arms, and came forward, saying bluntly, 'I am Madame Paul Gilbert, at your service. What did you want?'

"'I expected to find M. Gilbert's aunt here, — Mlle. de Nermont,' I replied.

"'She went out with Paul a quarter of an hour ago.'

"'That's too bad. I came to take

her to drive. She promised to meet me here.'

"'Then perhaps she will return soon. Will you wait for her?'

"'Thank you, if you will permit me.'

"And then, with all the courtesy of which a washerwoman is capable, 'Come in then, and take a seat. Feron, take the baby, and give him his supper in the kitchen. Close the doors, so that madame shall not hear him bawl.'

"'What a handsome child!' said I, pretending to admire the big baby, which was taken out of the room, to my great satisfaction. 'How old is he?'

"'Thirteen months. He is a little plague: he's just beginning to teeth.'

"'He's very bright, very pretty.'

"'Don't he look like his pa?'

"'M. Paul Gilbert?'

"'Of course.'

"'I don't know: I am very little acquainted with him. I think he looks like you.'

"'Yes? So much the worse. I would rather he looked like Paul.'

"'That is to say, you love your husband better than yourself.'

"'Oh, indeed, yes! He is so good. You know his aunt, then, and not him?'

"'I have seen him once or twice; not more.'

"'Perhaps you are — but of course not. How stupid I am! Mlle. Dietrich would not go out like you, all alone.'

"'You have heard, then, of Mlle. Dietrich?'

"'Yes: the aunt of Paul was her — how shall I say? — her first nurse. She taught her.' I ask your pardon, Pauline dear; but those were the very clear and delicate notions of Marguerite as to your duties. I am forced by my pitiless memory to report to you, word for word, her pretty talk.

"'It was,' I resumed, 'Mlle. de Nermont who told you of Mlle. Dietrich?'

"'No: it was Paul. One day he went to a ball at her papa's. It seems that they are very rich folks; and the girl wore diamonds and pearls worth millions.'

"'That was very silly; wasn't it?'

"'That's what Paul said; but I don't know. Every one is proud of what one has. I have no money, and I am proud of my baby; and whenever I go to the Luxembourg, or to the square, saying to myself that every one thinks him handsome, I am awfully proud, and hold my head as high as if I wore a queen's jewels.'

"This pretty innocence reconciled me with Marguerite. I found that she was neither bad nor perverse; and, seeing that she was so communicative and so open, I felt no aversion towards her. She is one of those chance companions whom a man might take for economy's sake, and wisely too. When a child comes, mere goodness attaches a man to such a one; but he doesn't marry that kind, and the time comes when he casts her off."

"You are talking, my dear, without reflection. You can't appreciate" —

"I beg your pardon: your pupil is no longer under your instruction. Whatever you have taken pains to keep her ignorant of when she was a girl, — and without much curiosity in those days, — she has been condemned to learn by mixing with the world, noticing what passes about her, hearing what is said, and guessing the rest. You may as well know that I have a very clear understanding about M. Paul's *liaison;* for this is what is called a *liaison,* — polite and admissi-

ble word, so as not to say *amour*. You think that the proper word sounds very coarse from my mouth. So it does; but you forced it upon me by calling it a marriage. So I have been compelled to make an examination of the coarse things which constitute the reality. Until then, however, I was innocent enough to believe in a legitimate connection; but Marguerite was stupid and maladroit. When I watched her from interested motives, she was embarrassed; but, when I spoke of bringing some old lace for her to restore, she told me all with touching sincerity. 'No,' said she: 'don't come here again yourself; for I see that you are a noble lady, and perhaps you might be sorry that you had been so good to me when you found that I was not what you supposed.' Then a little condolence on my part, and one or two pleasant words, which drew forth a flood of tears and of confessions. Now I know all, — the adventure with M. Jules, the student; the drowning; the rescue by your nephew; the hiding-place provided by him at Madame Feron's; and then the birth of the child after the relations with Paul, confessed with dreadful detail, for she took me for a married woman; and at last the hope of being married, which her motherhood had excited; the firm resistance of Paul, backed by you; the little domestic jars, her displeasure towards herself, her patience with him. The story was ended off with an enthusiastic and yet comical eulogy of Paul, of you, and of herself; for she is very green, this village girl. It was a mixture of stupid pride and puerile humility. She boasts of excelling every one else in the love and devotion of which she is capable. She closed by saying, 'I am the sinner; but I can console myself by knowing that I love as no other can. Paul will see! Let him only try to love some one else!' Then, after she had opened her heart to me, she began to inquire who I might be. 'Don't disturb yourself about that,' I replied. 'My name would tell you nothing. I am interested in you, and I pity you: let that suffice. Your position does not scandalize me; only you do wrong to take the name of M. Paul Gilbert. Did he authorize you to do so?'

"'No: on the contrary, he forbade me. As he does not wish to receive any of his friends here, he conceals his place of residence altogether; and this suite of apartments stands neither in his name nor in mine. I need to be concealed, too, on account of my mother, who would catch me if she found where I am; for I am still under age. I never go out, except at night with Paul in the streets when it is not very light. When you asked for Madame Paul Gilbert, I had a little fit of stupidity or pride; but no one knows me under that name. To tell the truth, no one knows me at all: I don't show myself. Madame Feron buys every thing, does all the errands, brings and carries away the work, and takes the baby out for his airing. For my part, I am a little tired of being shut up as I am; but I work with my hands, and try not to work too much with my poor head.'

"I promised to come and see her again," continued Cesarine; "and I shall keep my word, for I want to talk some more with her. I was afraid that you would come back, although I should have had a pretext to explain my presence at Marguerite's rooms. But I told her that the hour of my

appointment with you was past, and that I must go.

"'That's too bad,' said she, kissing my hand. 'I like you very much; and I should like to talk with you all day. If I had met a pretty, sweet lady like you who would have employed me, instead of falling in love with Paul, I should have been happier; and in sewing for you, looking out for your interests, washing, waiting upon you, and being a companion for you, I might have been a very good servant-girl.'

"'That may happen yet,' said I, laughing. 'Who knows? If M. Gilbert should abandon you, I would very gladly take you into my employ.' The word *abandon* hit her a little harder than I supposed it would. She uttered a cry, and for just a moment I thought that our friendship was at an end. She is quick-tempered, the little dear; but I avoided the explosion that threatened, by saying, 'I know that you are not of the kind of persons who are usually abandoned; but there are ways in which proud lovers get separated. Sometimes a single angry word is sufficient.'

"'You are right; but Paul will never speak that word. He has too big a heart. He could have but one way to abandon me, as you call it: let him make me see that he is unhappy with me, and I would not wait for my dismissal, but would take it.'

"'And what would you do with the child?'

"'Oh! he would not leave me the child: he loves it too much.'

"Has he publicly recognized it as his own?'

"'Indeed he has. It is registered as the son of an unknown mother, so that my family, which is wicked, shall never have any claim upon him.'

"'Then neither have you any claim upon him. You will lose him in being separated from M. Gilbert.'

"'It is just that which will make me cling to him, even if I should be unhappy with him. But if he should be unhappy, my poor Paul, I should let him have his Pierre; and I shouldn't go to find you, my little lady; I should have no more need of any thing. I should go away and die of grief, in obscurity,' And that is the way we separated."

"Very well. And after you had been to the Bois de Boulogne to reflect? May I know at what conclusion you arrived?"

"Certainly, this: Paul is my choice still. I love him; and he is the husband whom I want."

"At the expense of causing the poor Marguerite to die of grief? That you don't reckon upon!"

"Oh, yes! I reckon upon it; but it will not happen. I shall be very good to her. I shall teach her to understand what she is, what she is worth, what she weighs in the scale, what she ought to accept to preserve the esteem of Paul and my benefits, of which I do not intend to be sparing."

"And the child?"

"Its father, married to me, will have the means of educating it; and I should be a good mother to it. I have no reason to hate it, the little innocent. Marguerite could come and see it. We would send them into the country; and they would be happier than ever before."

"With what marvellous facility you arrange matters!"

"There is nothing difficult in life when one is rich, just, and decided in character. I am more energetic and far-seeing than you, my Pauline, because I am more free and less fastidi-

ous. What years have failed to make you know and appreciate, even to lead you to make a definite decision as to the future of your nephew, I knew, I judged, and I have discovered the solution in two hours. You will tell me that I underrate the attachment of Paul for his mistress, and the kind of aversion which he manifests towards me. I reply, that I believe neither in the aversion for myself nor the attachment to her. I saw it all very clearly in that singular and memorable interview which decided the fate of that young man and my own. I have seen still more clearly to-day. He thinks himself bound by duty; and his desperate defence was that of a man who is losing his heart. To-day he is suffering horribly. You don't see it; but I know it by the ingenuous confessions and the clumsy reticence of his mistress. He does not hope for salvation, but accepts the sad destiny which is spread out before him. He is a stoic, I do not forget that; and all the manifestations of his strength of soul attach him to me more and more. Yes; this fallen and vulgar girl to whom he submits, this brat whom he loves tenderly (true stoics are tender; that is logical), that lodging without comforts or attraction, that intense work to support a family which is a burden, and which he is forced to conceal as a shame, that pride which leads him to feign happiness in the midst of it all, — oh! it is grand, very beautiful, very noble. Your nephew is a man; and such a woman as I am is necessary to assume a share in his situation, and to tear him away from it without violence, without remorse, and without crime. Marguerite will weep and lament a little, no doubt; but the prospect of that does not affright me. I will take care of her. She is a child, a little savage, but very weak. In a year from now she will bless me; and Paul, my husband, will be the happiest of men."

"Better and better! It is arranged for the coming year! In what month and what day is the wedding to come off?"

"Laugh as much as you will, my Pauline. I am stronger than you, I tell you. I have no little scruples and childish qualms of conscience. I have patience in decision, you shall see, little aunt; and so kiss me. I am tired; but I have made up my mind: and so I can go to sleep as calmly as an infant."

She left me as bewildered as if, abandoned by an adventurous guide upon a lonely hill-top, I had lost the power of returning.

Was she not, after all, right? Was she not stronger than myself, than Marguerite, than Paul himself? Wholly absorbed in study, he could not, as she did, analyze the facts of practical life, and resolve its continual enigmas. Who knows if she were not the woman which she boasted of being, the only one he could love on that day when he should discover the loyalty and generosity which were always at the bottom of her most personal designs? A head so active, a soul so much above vengeance and evil instincts, an acceptance of accomplished facts so frank, such intelligence, and so much courage to bring her most impossible undertakings to a happy conclusion, — were all these not enough to obtain pardon for her caprice and coquetry?

XIII.

I FOUND myself thrown back to the point where Cesarine had led me when the threats of the Marquis de

Rivonnière had made me recoil in fright. Where was the marquis? What had become of him? Had he forgotten? Was he absent? If any one could have re-assured me on these points, the romance of Cesarine would not have been so disquieting and impossible.

I resolved to find out something about him, and, on reflection, determined that Bertrand was the man to investigate for me.

He was a singular person. His position was that of footman and something between a groom and a *valet-de-chambre*. *Valet-de-chambre* he could not be, for he did not know how to read and write; which ignorance, singularly enough, did not prevent him from expressing himself as well as any man of the world. He was thirty-five years old, serious, cold, of good bearing, very proud of his elegant form, wearing with ease and dignity his black coat set off with a plait of silk at the shoulder, always clean shaved, and cravated in irreproachable white, discreet, sober, silent, appearing to notice nothing and to hear nothing, but knowing all and understanding every thing, incorruptible always, devoted to Cesarine, and to me for her sake, a little scornful towards the rest of the family.

It was but eleven o'clock; and, M. Dietrich not having returned, Bertrand would probably be in the art-gallery. He liked to remain there, studying perseveringly the regularity of the furnace-registers, the progress of the clock-hands, and the condition of the ornamental plants.

I went down stairs, and found him there as I had expected. He came and stood before me. "Bertrand," said I, "I have some information to ask of you."

"I intended giving some to mademoiselle."

"To me? This evening?"

"To you, this evening, as soon as monsieur should have returned. I know that mademoiselle retires late."

"Well, speak, Bertrand."

"It is about monsieur, the Marquis de Rivonnière."

"Ah! I wanted to ask you about that very person. Have you any news of him?"

"I have. Mlle. Cesarine, who has no secrets from mademoiselle, must have told her all she has done to-day?"

"I know every thing. She has been with you to the Rue d'Assas, and to the Bois de Boulogne."

"Does Mlle. de Nermont know that monsieur the Marquis de Rivonnière assumes disguises to watch Mlle. Cesarine?"

"No. Does Cesarine know it?"

"I do not think she does."

"You should have warned her of it."

"I was not sure of it; and then Mlle. Cesarine, one day, when I brought her a letter from monsieur the marquis, said to me, 'Bring me nothing more from him: let me never hear from him again.' But to-day I recognized M. de Rivonnière so plainly in the costume of a working-man in the Rue d'Assas, that I made up my mind to notify Mlle. de Nermont."

"Bertrand, do you know to whose house Cesarine went in the Rue d'Assas?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. I was charged with the duty of following home the person who goes there every evening from Latour's publishing-house."

"Are you doing right, Bertrand, to be yourself a spy?"

"I believe I am always doing right

when I execute the orders of Mlle. Cesarine."

"Even in secret from her father and me?"

"M. Dietrich has no will in opposition to hers; and you yourself usually come to wish what she desires."

"It is true, because she always wishes to do good; and this time, as usual, there is a good action at the bottom of her curiosity."

"I think so too. Besides, as I am always and everywhere within a step of mademoiselle with a revolver and a dagger upon me, I do not fear that any one will insult her."

"Certainly you would defend her courageously."

"With coolness, mademoiselle; with coolness and presence of mind. It is my duty. Mlle. Cesarine explained it all to me one day, when she said, 'I wish to be able to go anywhere with you.'"

"It is well, my friend. Tell me now if M. de Rivonnière saw Cesarine enter the house where my nephew goes."

"He saw her come out. He was on the door-step when she re-entered her carriage."

"He has probably questioned the porter of that house?"

"Very certainly; for he looked at mademoiselle in a mocking manner, and seemed to wish that she would recognize him. But mademoiselle had other things on her mind, and did not look at him."

"Why do you think that he desired to mock her?"

"Because he is crazy with jealousy, and believes that mademoiselle expected to meet some one there. He has certainly established a countermine against me, as one might say. He must have known what I was charged to discover; and undoubtedly he now knows that monsieur, your nephew, has no expectation of meeting Mlle. Cesarine. It is well that you should know this: you are the person to be notified, mademoiselle. It is for me to execute your orders if you have any to give me for to-morrow."

"I will make arrangements with Mlle. Cesarine. Thanks, and good-evening, Bertrand."

So, notwithstanding the passage of time, — nearly three weeks it was since his threat was made, — the marquis had not desisted from his vengeful projects. He had told me the truth when he said that he was capable of nursing his wrath until it was assuaged, as he had preserved his hopeless love. He was, then, a dangerous man, neither a fool nor wicked perhaps, but incapable of governing his passions. He had spoken of murder without provocation as a lawful act; and he now knew with whom Cesarine was in love! I again cursed the wretched caprice to which she had almost made me consent. I resolved to warn M. Dietrich; and I waited until he should return, to meet him in the passage, and tell him all that had taken place, not forgetting what Bertrand had reported to me. "It is necessary," said I in conclusion, "that you should interpose in some way in this matter. I am powerless. I cannot remove my nephew: his work confines him to Paris; and besides, if I should tell him that any one had threatened him, he would be so much the more strongly determined to face an enmity which he would deem ridiculous, but which I regard as very serious. I have no more control over Cesarine. You are her father: you can take her away. For my part, I must notify the police to keep a watch

on the movements and the disguises of M. de Rivonnière."

"That would be a very serious move," said M. Dietrich; "and it might result in scandal, from which I would save my daughter. I will take her away from here if it is necessary; but first I will make a movement against the marquis. It is with me that he will have a quarrel, if he compromises Cesarine by his foolish jealousy and espionage. Be assured, I will watch, will learn all, and will act promptly; but just now I think that we have no occasion to be anxious about him. He supposes that Cesarine has to-day made a discovery, which of itself is a revenge for him, and that she will think no more of his rival, whose wife and child she has seen; for he cannot be ignorant of any thing that concerns your nephew."

"That is all very well, M. Dietrich: but to-morrow or next week he will know that Cesarine persists in loving Paul; for she is not the woman to conceal her movements and to change her mind. You know that very well yourself."

"I will act to-morrow. Now sleep in peace."

On the morrow, indeed, and at a very early hour, he repaired to the marquis's house. He did not find him in. The marquis was away, they said, on a journey, and had been gone several days. They did not know when he expected to return. To seek in Paris a man in concealment is possible only to the police. I was going, without telling any one my plan, to ask audience of the prefect, when Bertrand, with his usual impassible and haughty air, but with a look which seemed to say, "Pay attention," announced monsieur the Marquis de Rivonnière.

XIV.

THE marquis presented himself as much at ease and with as graceful courtesy as if there had been a parting only the night before on the best of terms. M. Dietrich gave him his hand as usual, but in silence; but Cesarine, whose brow contracted, and who seemed fairly weary of his attentions, said to him in an icy tone, "I didn't expect to see you again, Monsieur de Rivonnière."

"I did not suppose I was placed under a perpetual ban," he replied with that peculiar smile which Bertrand had noticed, and which was, as it were, stereotyped on his pale, tired face.

"You have not been placed under a ban at all," said Cesarine. "It may be that I have let you become aware of my displeasure when you have seemed to lack good breeding; but one pardons much in an old friend, and I did not dream of banishing you. You have deemed it good to banish yourself. It is not the first time that you have gone away out of sulkiness; but you have generally been at some pains to give an explanation of your absence. That was, of course, to preserve the right of returning. This time you have neglected a formality of which I excuse no one. You have ceased to visit us because that course was pleasing to you: you return because you please to do so. But these ways are not pleasing to me. I like to know whether the persons I receive are friends or enemies. If they are of the latter category, I admit them only on my guard. Will you tell me on what footing I ought to receive you? Have as much courage and frankness as you please, but do not suppose that I will tolerate the least lack of respect."

Astounded by this reprimand, the

marquis tried to justify himself. He pretended that he had really been absent from the city; that he had sent a card P. P. C., which was not true; and, as he did not know how to lie, his excuses were changed into confusion and contradiction.

M. Dietrich, who had hitherto preserved silence, then spoke. "Monsieur," said he, after having given an order that no other visitors should be admitted, "you have come to seek an explanation which I meant to ask of you this morning. You have caused it to be understood that you were absent, and you have nevertheless not been away from Paris. Quite as much as my daughter have I the right to regard it as strange that you have not deemed it proper to give us a reason for your disappearance. But my astonishment is still more deep and serious than hers; for I know what she does not. You have constituted yourself her spy: I will not use a word that would perhaps be more just, but too cruel. Your excuse is without doubt in a passion or a fit of anger which justifies yourself in your own eyes, but which it is time to overcome if you will not frankly confess."

"Well, I confess frankly," replied the marquis, driven to his wit's end by the coolness of M. Dietrich. "I have acted as a spy, as a criminal. I have tasted all the shame of the part I have been playing, now that I am unmasked. But it is not for M. Dietrich to reproach me so harshly. I have done what he has not done: I have fulfilled towards his daughter a duty which my devotion for her suggested, and which he could not fulfil because he was unaware of the peril."

M. Dietrich interrupted him. "You are mistaken, sir. I was better informed than you. I knew that in no conduct of my daughter was there danger for her. I now know this, that you take upon yourself to prevent her from making choice of another than yourself as her husband. That choice she has not made; but she has the right to make it. I am ready to maintain that right, and to cause it to be respected. You know that I have sincerely regretted to see you foiled by her; but at this moment I do not regret it any more, seeing your lack of wisdom and dignity. I declare this to you with no intention of retracting a word of it, whatever of excuse or threat you may have to offer."

"You shall have neither from me," replied the marquis. "I know the respect which I owe to you and to myself. I withdraw, to await at home the orders which it shall please you to give me."

"Well done!" cried Cesarine, as soon as he had done. "Thanks, dear papa! You have enforced the respect due to your daughter."

"Unhappy girl!" said I to her with an energy which I could not repress. "You think only of yourself. You do not see that there is a duel to follow this interview, and that your folly places your father face to face with the sword of a man whom you have driven to exasperation."

Cesarine became pale, and cast herself on her father's neck. "It is not true!" she cried. "Say it is not true, or I shall die."

"It is not true," replied M. Dietrich. "Our friend exaggerates my duty and my intentions. If M. de Rivonnière is satisfied, the affair is ended. But" —

"Ah, yes! There is a *but*. Father, you drive me to despair. You will make me mad!"

"You must be calm, my daughter.

I am young yet, and in a question of honor one man is as good as another. To complain of your conduct would come with bad grace from me, since I have not been able to make my authority prevail, and force you to prudence. I ought to accept the consequences of my tenderness for you; and I do accept them."

He gently disengaged himself from her arms, and went out. She was literally choked with tears, and vowed to me that she would never again go out alone, and thus subject her father to the penalty of her eccentricities.

She kept her promise several days. I spoke to Bertrand to make him agree to carry for her no more letters without showing them to M. Dietrich or to myself. He hesitated long before making any such promise. In his view, Cesarine had the best judgment of any one in the house. If any one could disperse the clouds which had gathered about us, the threatening character of which he very well understood, for he guessed what was not told him, it was Cesarine, and no one else. However, he was conquered by my persistence, and promised. Three days after, he brought me a letter from Cesarine addressed to M. de Rivonnière, at the same time asking me to request M. Dietrich to settle up with him. "I have never betrayed good masters," he said; "and you have forced me to make a bad promise. Mlle. Cesarine will have no more confidence in me. I cannot remain in a house where I am not esteemed.'

I did not know what to say. This man was right: it was too late to restrain Cesarine. To deprive her of her most trusty and most devoted servant was to drive her to commit acts of yet greater imprudence. I returned the letter to Bertrand, and expected that Cesarine would come and tell me what it contained; for it was very seldom that she did not ask advice as soon as she had acted on impulse.

She did not come, and my anxiety was renewed. This time, I feared no longer for my nephew. I was sure that Cesarine had not seen him again; but I feared for M. Dietrich, whom the conduct of the marquis had greatly irritated, and who appeared not in the least disposed to forgive it.

The next morning, Cesarine came into my room, saying, "I am going out: will you go with me?"

"Certainly," I replied; "and I should not suppose that you would like to go out without me, in the circumstances in which you have placed your father."

"Don't scold me," she said: "I have resolved to repair my faults, cost what it may. You are coming?"

"Where are we going?"

"I will tell you after we have started."

Orders had been already given to the coachman by Bertrand; and we rode through the Champs Elysées, without any explanation from Cesarine. When we reached the Place de la Concorde, she said, "We are going to buy some flowers at Lemichez's, Rue des Trois Couronnes."

We alighted in the garden of that florist, and walked through his greenhouses, where Cesarine selected some very costly plants. At three o'clock, she looked at her watch, and, at the same moment, we saw the Marquis de Rivonnière enter. "This is one of my friends," said Cesarine to the clerk who accompanied us. "We will carry away the flowers in our two carriages. Will you be good enough to put them in the carriages carefully, so that they shall not be broken? and tell them th

will pay for them at once." We therefore remained in the green-house, whither the marquis came to join us. "Thanks, my friend," said she, extending her hand to him: "you have come to my rendezvous. You, of course, understood that I could not, under present circumstances, admit you to the presence of my father. Sit down on this bench. It's a nice place to have a chat.

"Monsieur de Rivonnière, I have reflected: I have examined my conduct. I have condemned it, and it is to you I wish to make the confession. I have not betrayed you, seeing that I never had any love for you; and I have not deceived you by laying my refusal of you to a pronounced aversion to marriage. I was sincere. I loved no one, and I believed that my love of liberty would never be satiated. It has been, much sooner than I expected. The world wearies me; liberty has frightened me. I have seen some one who pleases me, whom I shall not marry perhaps, who probably will never know that I love him, but whom it is impossible for me not to love. Shall I tell you all? I believed myself a very strong woman: I am but a weak child, and so much the weaker because I did not believe in love, and did not put myself on my guard against it. I am *his* now, and I shall die of shame and grief because my passion is not reciprocated. If you long for vengeance, be satisfied. I am as much punished as is possible, for having preferred an unknown person to a tried friend. But you are neither cruel nor egotistic nor vindictive; and, if you have had appearances against you in the events which have made you lose the affection of my father, the fault is mine, mine only. I did not understand you; I have misjudged you; I was suspicious of you. Your wrongs were my work. I have exasperated you; frightened you; cast you into a sort of delirium. I ought to have told you the first day what I tell you now. My friend, pity me! I am unhappy. Be good. Have mercy on me!"

Speaking thus, with an emotion that rendered her more beautiful than ever, Cesarine made as though she would kneel to M. de Rivonnière. The latter, full of astonishment and despair, prevented her, crying, "What are you going to do? It is you who are foolish and cruel. Do you wish to kill me? What do you ask? what do you require of me? Have I understood? I believed it a caprice. For my consolation, you tell me it is a passion! And you wish, — my God! My God! what is it that you wish?"

"What your heart and your conscience proclaim to you, my friend," she answered, still all the time inclining towards him, and holding his trembling hands in hers. "I want you to pardon my lack of esteem, my ingratitude, my silence. When you said to me, 'Confess your love for another, and I will remain your friend,' — for you have said that, — I was compelled to believe you. It was your justice, it was your honor, which spoke simultaneously. I believed it a snare. That was my fault, and the cause of your disappointment. My mistrust has deceived you. You have believed it a caprice, say you? That might well be. So you have treated me as a fantastic child, whom one would protect and save in spite of herself. You have regarded that as a duty, and have employed all the means in your power to fulfil it. Now you discover the truth: you see that it is a passion, and that I am suffering frightfully. Your duty is changed. It is for you to sustain me,

to pity me, to console me; if it is possible, to love me still! — to love me as a sister, to devote yourself to me as a tender brother! Do not cause me the terrible sorrow of losing my best friend, at the moment when I have the most need of him."

And she threw her arms around his neck and embraced him, as she would have embraced M. Dietrich when she was bent upon conquering him. She could not fail to succeed thus with the marquis, — he was conquered already.

"You kill me!" said he; "and I kiss the hand which gives the blow. Ah! how well you are aware of your sway over me, and how relentlessly you abuse it! Come, you have triumphed. What must I do? Are you going to demand that I bring to your feet the ingrate who disdains you?"

"Ah!" she cried, "that is the great question. If he suspected my passion, I should die of grief and shame. No: there is nothing for you to do but to accept the fact of my being enamoured of another, and to love me well enough to ask my father's pardon for the imputation of wrongs which you have made to him. Tell him the truth, accuse me, explain your own conduct as you please. Tell him that you have no other ambition than to play towards me the part of guardian angel. Justify yourself, give him your word of honor for the future, and leave me to reconcile you. It will not be difficult. He loves you so much, my poor father; he is so unhappy in his disagreement with you."

The marquis hesitated to make this promise with reference to M. Dietrich. But Cesarine wept so much and so effectively, that he promised to come to the house that very evening; and he came.

She had required me to be silent, in regard to this interview which she had so skilfully brought about, because she wished it to seem that the marquis had come of his own accord.

I hesitated about deceiving M. Dietrich. "Can you blame me?" she cried. "Whatever I contrive, to save the life of my father, ought to seem to you a sacred task, that I have arranged with energy, and carried through with tact and devotion. If I had followed your advice of remaining quiet, of hiding myself, of committing no more of what you call my acts of imprudence, the resentment of these two men would have perpetuated itself, and would have led, sooner or later, to a collision. Thanks to me, they will be more attached to each other than ever; and you shall be forever at rest in your mind with regard to your nephew. M. de Rivonnière is not so chivalrous and so generous as I have told him. He has the instincts of a tiger beneath his charming manner. But I count upon making him what he ought to be; and I shall thus render him a great service, for which he will give me credit sooner or later. When one cannot fight with a wild beast, it may be wheedled into tameness. I committed a great fault the day I lost patience with him."

M. Dietrich, surprised by the visit of the marquis, accepted his expressions of penitence as frankly as Cesarine had foreseen. Poor Rivonnière was as pale as death. It was easy to see that he had suffered torture on that terrible day. His self-abasement gave great weight to the vow which he made to respect the liberty of Cesarine, and to remain her devoted friend. M. Dietrich embraced him. Cesarine at once held out her two hands to him, and then seated herself at the piano, and played to him, in a most expressive

manner, his favorite airs. His nerves were unstrung. The marquis wept like a child, and went away conquered but blessed.

"Well, mademoiselle," said Bertrand, whom I met in the hall after the door had closed on M. de Rivonnière, "you were right to let me carry the letter. I told you that there was no one like Mlle. Cesarine to arrange matters. She thought about it, she willed it, she wrote, she has spoken, and the thing is done."

It was true. The thing was done. Was Cesarine, then, deep in ruses and cruelties? No: she was fruitful of resource and facile in execution. She threw herself into the part she had to play so thoroughly, that she cast out all the emotions which were the fruit of them. She firmly believed in her own inspiration, in her woman's tact; and she persuaded herself that she was compassing the safety of others, when she was only drowning them to give place to herself.

She was therefore, as usual, mistress of the situation. She had induced her father to accept every thing; she had paralyzed the vengeance of the marquis; she had surprised and worried me to the point where I could no longer find good reasons for resisting her. Only Paul remained to be conquered; and, as she remarked, that matter had been much simplified. The forces of her will, having but this one object to attain, were increased ten-fold. "What do you intend to do?" I asked. "Are you going to attack and provoke him once more, after the bad result of your first advances?"

"I have blundered once," she replied, "and I shall not do so again. I shall take another course, exactly what, I cannot tell. I shall be on the watch, and take my chance. It will come, never fear. Human affairs always bring their contingent of unexpected succor to the will which waits for an opportunity."

The fatal chance really came; but in the midst of circumstances so complicated, that it is necessary to go back a little.

XV.

MARGUERITE had not concealed from Paul the visit of Cesarine; and she had described the stranger so well, that he had no difficulty in recognizing her. He had told me the story; and I had explained. It was no longer possible to conceal the truth from him. Little by little he learned all; but we were at great pains not to speak of it before Marguerite, whose jealousy would have been kindled by it.

Paul's nobility of character shone forth under these new and trying circumstances. As he was in the habit of merely laughing at me when I questioned him, I adjured him, one evening when we were walking together, to answer me seriously once for all. "Haven't I already done so?" he asked with surprise. "Why do you suppose that I could change my sentiments and my desire?"

"Because circumstances are modifying the situation every moment; because M. Dietrich will consent; because I shall be forced to consent; because M. de Rivonnière will resign himself to the situation; because you are not very happy with Marguerite; and because you are not bound to her by a real duty. Her lot and that of her child assured, nothing condemns you to sacrifice, to a woman whom you do not love, a most brilliant future and a most flattering conquest."

"Aunt," he replied, "you play upon the word *love*. I do love Marguerite as I love my child; because she has given me this child, and because she is but a child herself. That tender indulgence, which weakness naturally inspires in a man, is a very deep and a very healthy sentiment. He does not give the violent emotions of a romantic passion; but he fulfils honest duties, and leaves no place for a yearning after the more exciting passions. I am of a sober and staid nature. That requirement which is imperious in others is in me but moderately developed. I am not attracted by feverish pleasures. My nerves are not excitable; my mind is scarcely at all poetical; an ideal is for me but a chimera, — that is to say, a monster with a fine but deceitful countenance. In my estimation, the charm of a woman is not in the extraordinary development of her will: on the contrary, it is in the tender and generous surrender of her powers. Perfect happiness existing nowhere, — for I do not call happiness the transient intoxication of certain situations that are envied, — I have taken my happiness at my own door; I have made it suitable to myself; I intend to keep it; and I defy Mlle. Dietrich to persuade me that she has any thing more desirable to offer me. If she should succeed in disquieting me, by working upon my senses or my imagination, upon the weak or the brutal part of my nature, I should still know how to resist the temptation; and, if I felt in any danger of yielding to it, I should make a grand finish to her hopes. I would marry Marguerite."

"Marry Marguerite! That is not possible, my dear boy."

"It is not easy, I know; but it is not impossible. The union would wound your very proper pride. Therefore, I will not resolve upon it until the last extremity."

"What do you call the last extremity?"

"The danger of falling into a humiliation worse than that of saddling myself with the past of a ruined girl, — the danger of yielding to the domination of a haughty and imperious woman. Marguerite will never play with my jealousy. She has the great advantage of not being capable of inspiring me with that passion. I am sure of the present. The past does not belong to me; and I have never been disturbed myself on account of it, nor reproached her with it. The man who seduced her exists no more, either for her or for myself. She has annihilated him by refusing his aid, and by desiring not to know what is become of him. Never have either of us heard of him. He is, probably, dead. I can, therefore, easily forget that I am not her first love, in the certainty that I shall be her last."

Some days after this conversation, I found Marguerite in high spirits. I had no great pleasure in conversing with her; but, as I went to see an old friend in her neighborhood every week, I used to inquire after Pierre on the way. Marguerite had a quantity of work to do that had just been sent in; and I recognized it as sent by Cesarine. "It was that pretty lady, your friend, who brought me this," she said. "She came this morning, on foot, by the Luxembourg, followed by her servant bearing this lace. She staid to chat with me nearly an hour. She gave me good advice about the health of baby, who is troubled by his teeth. She inquired about every thing that concerned me with so much goodn — oh! she is an angel; and I love

well enough to cast myself into the fire for her. She wouldn't tell me her name. You will; won't you?"

"No: because she doesn't wish it."

"Does Paul know it?"

"I can't tell you."

"It is curious that she should make a mystery of it. It is some charitable lady, who hides the good she does."

"Do you really need this work, Marguerite?"

"Yes: we haven't had much to do for a good while. Mme. Feron, who is quite proud, is worried by it, and pretends sometimes not to be hungry, so as not to be an expense to Paul. But she suffers many privations; and the baby interferes with our work. Paul does all he can for us, — perhaps more than he is really able; for he retains his old habits of industry and economy still, and I am sometimes troubled by the way he has to pinch himself."

"Accept something from me, my child, and you shall no more be an expense to him."

"He forbade me; and I have sworn not to disobey him. Besides, we are getting along very well. My pretty lady will furnish me work. Here is enough now for a long time, God be thanked! She pays us handsomely, — double what we should have asked."

"But this quantity of work and the double price seem very much like charity. Are you not afraid that Paul will be displeased with you for accepting it?"

"No one will tell him. The charity, if there is any, is all to the profit of Mme. Feron, who needs it; and it is for her I have accepted it. You would not prevent that good woman from earning her living? Besides, Paul wouldn't have the right."

I thought it my duty to say no more; but I saw that fire had been opened, and that Cesarine was laying plans to make Marguerite smooth her mysterious way.

The next morning, I had a new surprise. I found Marguerite in the entry before Cesarine's door. She had received from her the following letter: —

"My dear child, — I have forgotten something important in regard to the way the lace is to be cut. It is necessary that you should yourself take the measures. I send you my carriage. Enter, and come here.

"THE LADY WHO SENT THE LACE."

"Did Paul consent?" I demanded.

"Paul had gone to the store. But there was no time to reflect; and then I was so happy to get into the handsome carriage, all lined with satin like a princess's dress; and the horses! servants before and behind! and it went so fast that I was afraid we should run down some one. I wanted to cry out, 'Look out, there!' Ah! I never had so much pleasure before."

Cesarine, who was dressing, bade Marguerite enter. I followed her.

"Oh, ho! you are interested in our little business," said she, with a malicious smile. "There is no way to conceal any thing from you. When I only wanted to fix up my room after your ideas, and surprise you!" Then, addressing Marguerite, she showed her some things which she pretended she wished to have measured, and told her to be very exact about the pattern.

"But, madame," cried Marguerite, taking the gold scissors, and casting a dazed look around upon the elegant furniture and the costly jewels, "tell me where I am, and whether you are a queen or a princess!"

"Neither," she replied. "I am scarcely more noble than you, my child. My father has made a fortune by work. That is why I am interested in persons who live by their labor. But it is useless for me to make a mystery which Mlle. de Nermont would betray. My name is Cesarine Dietrich, — a young lady whom M. Paul does not like at all."

"He is wrong, very wrong: you are so amiable and so good!"

"He has told you quite the contrary; has he not?"

"No: he has told me nothing. Oh, yes! he did think you dressed too finely at the ball; but that's all. If he knew you ever so little, he would pardon that."

"He has not told you to ask pardon for him," said I, a little severely, to Marguerite.

She looked at me in amazement. Cesarine took her by the arm, and led her about the room and through all that part of the house. She was amused by Marguerite's astonishment, her innocent questions, her ideas — sometimes correct, sometimes very silly — about the things she saw. Walking about in this manner, Cesarine escaped from my control, and played the part of Mephistopheles to this Marguerite.

Seeing that Cesarine was resolved to put me aside for the moment, I left her room, whither she led Marguerite, and kept her there a long time. Then Cesarine undertook to conduct her back to the carriage, which was to carry her home; and, in crossing the hall, they found me there with the Marquis de Rivonnière. And then occurred an unexpected scene, which was fraught with grave consequences.

"Good-morning, marquis," said Cesarine, who came in first. "I was expecting you. You are going to breakfast with us?"

At this moment, and as M. de Rivonnière was advancing to kiss the hand of his sovereign, he found himself face to face with Marguerite, who followed her. He stopped an instant as if paralyzed; and Marguerite, who could neither conceal any thing, nor restrain herself in the least, uttered a loud cry, and started back.

"Who is it?" asked Cesarine.

"Jules!" cried Marguerite, staring at the marquis as if she saw a ghost.

M. de Rivonnière had recovered his self-possession, and said with a smile, "Who? Jules? What does this pretty girl mean?"

"Isn't your name Jules?" she asked in great confusion.

"No," said Cesarine: "you have been deceived by a resemblance of some kind. His name is Jacques de Rivonnière. Come, my dear. Marquis, I will return."

She led her away. "That is your poor, abandoned victim," said I to M. de Rivonnière. "Confess it."

"Yes, it is she. Do you know her?"

"Undoubtedly. She is my nephew's mistress. How is it that you did not know as much, — you, who have prowled so long about his house?"

"I have known it a very short time. But how could I expect to meet her here? In the name of Heaven, do not tell Cesarine that I am that Jules" —

"If you wish to deceive her" —

Cesarine returned. Her first words were, "Ah! now tell me, marquis, why she called you Jules. Did she, then, never find out who you were? She swears that it was a simple student by the name of Morin, and that, notwithstanding your grand ap-

pearance and fine dress, you are a false marquis. This is going to be a very diverting romance. Come, tell us all about it quickly, before breakfast."

"You are laughing at me."

"No; for I am afraid that I shall have to judge you very culpable and blameworthy."

"Then permit me to remain silent."

"No," said I: "you must now confess all. My nephew thinks of marrying this Marguerite. I ought to know if she is worthy to be pardoned, and whether she did not make a lying boast when she pretended to have returned your gifts. Confess; for it is the part of honor."

"Then I will confess, since she has been so imprudent as to speak."

And he related how, at a moment when he desired to cure himself of his love for Mlle. Dietrich, he had been wandering in a half-distracted state, at random, in the environs of Paris, on the banks of the Seine, with a strong inclination to commit suicide. There he had met this girl, whose beauty had struck him, and who, maltreated by her mother, suffered herself to be carried off by him. In order not to compromise himself, he had given her the first name that occurred to him; and, in order to inspire her with confidence, had represented himself as a poor student in a situation to marry her. He lodged her at a little country-house in the suburbs, where he went secretly to see her, in a costume suited to the lie he had told her, and where she showed herself to no one. She was modest, and had no other ambition than to marry him, however poor he might be. This connection lasted several weeks. Business having called the marquis to his estates in Normandy, he had heard that Cesarine was at Trouville. His passion for her revived as soon as he saw her. He had sent Dubois, his confidential servant, to Marguerite, to announce the marriage of Jules Morin, and to send her a pocket-book containing fifty thousand francs. The money she threw in the servant's face, saying, "He has deceived me, because he is rich. I am suspicious of him. Tell him that I shall love him no more, and will never see him again." Dubois had not regarded it as his duty to hasten to bring this answer to his master, especially as the latter had followed Cesarine to Dieppe. It was only three months afterwards, on his return to Paris, that he learned of the refusal and the disappearance of Marguerite. He had sent to her mother, to whose house she had returned, indeed; but, after an attempt at suicide, she had disappeared anew, and no one in the village doubted that she had drowned herself, because, as they said, "That was her idea." The marquis added, "I do not dissemble my fault; and I am ashamed of it. Remorse has more than once tormented me for it."

"Don't speak of that," said Cesarine: "I have committed wrongs towards you, which do not allow me to be severe to-day."

"So much the more," he replied, "since you have been the cause, the involuntary" —

"And very innocent cause of your conduct. I will not accept that statement as a merited reproach, my friend. If all women, whose refusal to fall in love has had such adventures for consequences, ought to reproach themselves, half of my sex would wear mourning. But all this is not so very serious, since Marguerite is consoled."

"And since she has repaired her error," added I, "by wise and noble

conduct. I am very glad to find that the story of M. de Rivonnière is exactly like hers, and that my nephew may esteem and forgive his companion."

"And indeed he ought," replied Cesarine quickly. "But to give her his name after what has happened, under the eyes of the marquis, you can't think of that, my Pauline. I should like to see the figure you would cut, if it should happen that Mme. Paul Gilbert, on the arm of her husband, should cry out on meeting the Marquis de Rivonnière, 'There's Jules!'"

"Surely that could not happen," said the marquis. "Why need M. Paul Gilbert know?"

"He will be informed," replied Cesarine.

"By yourself?" I cried.

"Yes, by her," said the marquis sorrowfully. "You know that she wishes to prevent this marriage."

"You are both of you dreaming," exclaimed Cesarine, who had never confessed to the marquis that Paul was the object of her preference, and who always diverted his suspicions when she saw his jealousy reviving. "What does it matter to me? If I had the purpose which you attribute to me, how could I endure the presence of Marguerite near me? I sent for her to come here to-day. I have given her work; have occupied myself with her affairs; have interested myself in her child, who, by the way, is sick. Perhaps I shall go to see him to-morrow. You both think that very strange? Why? I can imagine this poor girl to be altogether worthy of the love of a gallant man, but I am not obliged to see in her a suitable niece for Mlle. de Nermont. I say even that it is the duty of Pauline not to allow her nephew to remain in ignorance of the meeting of to-day, or the real name of Marguerite's seducer."

"So be it," cried the marquis, rising, as if struck by a new idea. "If M. Paul Gilbert really loves his companion, he will understand that he has an account to settle with me: he will seek a quarrel with me, and" —

"And you will fight?" added Cesarine, rising also, in an unconstrained manner. "You long for it, marquis; and now your ferocity re-appears. For my part, I do not like duels, which are absurd at best; and I swear that M. Paul Gilbert shall know nothing. It isn't Marguerite who will boast of having found her old lover. It isn't Pauline who will expose her darling nephew to a stupid and wicked risk. It isn't you who will provoke him, by a confession which will not show you off to the best advantage. At least, as it does not enter your head to dispute with him the possession of Marguerite, I see no reason why you should have the cruelty to deprive your victim of her necessary protector. So, now, enough of this drama: let us go and breakfast, and speak no more of these silly affairs, which there is no necessity to turn into tragedy."

XVI.

IF Cesarine had prodigious resources at the service of her will, she had also the blindness of pride and an exaggerated confidence in her power of fascination. That is the danger of such natures as hers. Profound faith, true passion, are not the motive power of their ambition. If they go in pursuit of an ideal, it is not the ideal itself which draws them on: it is the love of contest, the intoxication of the fray. If my nephew had been easy to be persuaded and conquered, she would have

despised him, and paid no further attention to him.

She thought she had found in the marquis a rebellious, but weak slave, whom a turn of her hand would forever subdue. She was mistaken. She had, without knowing it, changed the character of this man, whose heart was generous, but whose intellect was not great. For several years she had drawn him in her suite, honoring him with the title of friend, but abusing his submission; confiding to him, in her fits of vanity, her theories of grand diplomacy, which had been effectual in governing her relatives, her friends, and him. At first, the marquis had been provoked at what seemed to him precocious perversity, and he had tried to dissuade her. Then he saw that Cesarine used only allowable means, and subdued others only by rendering them happy. Such was at least her pretence, her illusions; the justification which she claimed, as do all despots, of her invasions, and of which she was herself the first dupe. The marquis was overcome by her sophisms, and he returned to her side without being any longer disquieted. But once more he began to suffer, to distrust, and to fall back upon his fixed idea, — to fight against her and against his preferred rival, whoever he might be.

She did not hold him by as strong cords as she supposed. He had studied in her school the art of not yielding, and he had not, like her, feminine delicacy in the choice of means. Therefore, it occurred to him, after the explanation which I have just reported, to awaken the jealousy of Paul, and to bring about a duel, in spite of the arrangements of Cesarine. He had given his word, but he could no longer keep it; and, moreover, he believed himself absolved because Cesarine had violated her own agreement in concealing the name of his rival, to the injury of that absolute confidence which she had promised him. This was, at least, the explanation which he gave me, after having committed the acts which I am now about to narrate.

He left us immediately after breakfast, to write to Marguerite the following letter, which was carried to her by Dubois: —

"If I pretended not to recognize you this morning, it was only because I did not wish to compromise you. But the persons at whose house we met know all; and I have learned from them that you hope to marry your new protector. The fault was all mine, and your unhappy position is my work. I wish to repair, as far as I can, the injury I have done you. I appreciated and admired the pride which led you to do as you did with my gift; but now you are a mother, and you have no right to refuse what I offer you. Accept, then, a pretty country-house and a little lot of land, which will set at rest forever any fears of coming to want. You need never see me again; and you can preserve your relations with the father of your child, as they must be very sweet to you. Whenever those relations become painful, you can break them without danger to the future of your boy, and without fear for yourself. Perhaps, also, seeing you in good circumstances, M. Paul Gilbert may decide to marry you. Accept, then, Marguerite, the disinterested reparation I offer you. It is your right, it is your duty as a mother.

"If you wish for fuller information, write me.

"Marquis de Rivonnière."

Marguerite at first crumpled the letter in her hand with suspicion, not fully

understanding it. But Mme. Feron, who could read better, and was more practical, read it over, and explained all its terms to her. Mme. Feron was very honest, and very much devoted to Paul and his friend; but she expected the rupture of their relations, and understood the difficulties of the situation. It seemed to her the duty of Marguerite towards her son to accept the means of existence and the opportunity of liberty. Marguerite, who desired to be married in order to preserve the dignity of her position as a mother, fell into the monstrous mistake of being willing to accept for the child of Paul the price of her first slip. She immediately sent Mme. Feron to the marquis. He gave the promised explanation, in a gift of a magnitude to surpass the hopes of the two women. Marguerite had nothing to do but sign a paper. He gave her a deed of a good little farm in Normandy, which she was supposed to have bought, and of which she could take immediate possession.

When Marguerite had this document before her, she spelled it all out with care, to assure herself of the validity of the act, and of the respectful and delicate form in which it was couched. As the Feron read each expression to her, she followed it with eye and finger, her heart beating, and perspiration on her brow. "Come," said her companion, "sign quickly, and it will all be done. Here are two copies. You are to keep one, and the other I shall return to the marquis. I shall get back before Paul comes. I have two hours. He will suspect nothing, provided you never speak of it to his aunt, nor to Mlle. Dietrich, nor to any one in the world. I told the marquis that you would accept, only on condition of its being kept an absolute secret."

Marguerite trembled in every limb. "My God!" said she, "I don't know why I imagine myself signing my shame. I resign my position as an honest woman."

"You might as well do it, my poor Marguerite: you will never be regarded as an honest woman, when you are not married, although Paul loves you very much, I am sure. But his aunt will never consent to your marriage. Besides, this signature pledges you to nothing. You are not obliged to go and live in Normandy, or to tell Paul that you have property. I will go and get your rents, without his knowing any thing. In one short day the railroad will carry you there and bring you back, the marquis has told me so. If, some day, you should quarrel with Paul, for that may happen, — you worry him very much sometimes, — well, then you will go and live as a small farmer in the country, with your boy, whom he will let you carry away for his happiness and health. I suppose that this poor Paul, who works and pinches to give us the necessaries of life, may die at last. What will become of you and your child? Will you live on the charity of his aunt, and of Mlle. Dietrich? These chances don't come but once. You know very well that the work of two women isn't enough to bring up a young man of good family. Then your Pierre will be a mechanic, scarcely knowing how to read and write. As for that, they are happy enough, the mechanics; but Pierre is a well-born child. He is the grandson of a doctor, and noble on his grandmother's side. You ought to make a country gentleman of him, and be able to educate him; otherwise, he will reproach you for his hard lot."

"But if he should reproach me for having a better?"

"Need he know whence it comes? Children never rake up such things. They take the good fortune which they can get; and one should sacrifice pride to their interests."

Marguerite signed. The Feron fled without giving her time for reflection.

The marquis had not expected that Paul could remain long in ignorance of the contract, which he hastened to deposit with his lawyer, and which he desired to be recorded as soon as might be. He knew Marguerite: he was sure she was incapable of keeping a secret. A little circumstance which was not premeditated led quickly to the expected result. In taking leave of Mme. Feron, he gave her, for Marguerite, a little jewel-box, which he told her was the usual *pot-de-vin*. At this word *pot-de-vin*, Marguerite, who did not understand that he meant a sign of ownership, and whom Mme. Feron had found in tears, began to laugh, with the facility with which children pass from one emotion to another. "Is his wine then so very good," she said, "that he gives so little of it at a time?" She opened the box, and found a diamond ring of great value. Once she would have been angry; but she had seen, that very morning, Cesarine's jewels, and, although she had tried not to covet them, their dazzling brightness remained in her memory. She put the ring on her finger, declaring to Feron that she would put it away in the box, and hide it again. "No," said the other: "you must sell it. It would betray you. Give it to me now; and I will bring you back the money. Money isn't signed, and Paul won't look where we will put ours. He never knows what we have: he is satisfied to ask us if we need any thing. Now we can tell him that we want nothing; and, if he is astonished, we can show him the work. He can't find any thing out of the way in Mlle. Dietrich's giving us work."

Marguerite hid the ring. It was too late to sell it. Paul would soon return and he did quickly return with me. I had dined early alone, so as to go to his office. He had written me that he was a little uneasy, because the boy was ill.

There was nothing serious the matter with the child. I had been telling Paul, as we walked, of the visit of Marguerite to Cesarine, first making him promise not to blame Marguerite for her confidence, in the fear of awakening his suspicion. He was very much disturbed by seeing the benefits of Mlle. Dietrich insinuating themselves into his household. "If she expects to catch me in that way, she is mistaken," said he. "She is stupidly clumsy, this grand diplomate of yours."

I told him, that, until further developments, the best course was to appear not to perceive what was going on at home. He promised me it should be so. We could not have dreamed of the serious events which had already taken place.

Re-assured as to the health of the boy, I was about to retire, when Paul said to me that something very unusual must be going on at his house. Neither Marguerite nor Madame Feron had dined: they were eating in secret in the kitchen, and talking together in a low voice, becoming silent or pretending to sing when they heard him approaching. "They seem to me a little dazed," said I. "I have noticed that. It is the effect of the ride in the 'master's carriage,' and the sight of the marvellous things in the Dietrich house, which she is narrating to her compan-

ion; or else it is due to the joy of so much beautiful work to do."

Paul feigned to accept that explanation; but his suspicion was aroused. He led me to the door, saying, "Mlle. Dietrich's attentions are getting to be a bore, aunt. She introduces her own folly of spirit, and her own confusion, into my dwelling. She forces me to occupy myself with her, to distrust every one about me, to watch my poor Marguerite, who never before went out of the house without my permission, and whom I must scold this evening."

"Don't scold her, but take a few hundred francs, and carry her away immediately into the country."

"Bah! Mlle. Dietrich, thanks to M. Bertrand, would unearth us in two days. I must remain in the neighborhood of Paris, or I should lose sight of my boy, whom these two women do not know how to take care of. I see only one way, — to let Mlle. Dietrich know in very plain terms that I do not desire any assistance from her in my family affairs, and that I will not have her father's protection for myself."

Paul was much excited when I left him. The name of Cesarine irritated him; her image beset him. I saw with terror that he was rapidly coming to hate her, and love is so near hate! yet I could do nothing to conjure away the danger.

Paul, feeling himself carried away by his anger, determined to wait until the next day before notifying Marguerite not to go out without his permission. He retired early to his working-room; but he could not work. A vague dread oppressed him. He threw himself on his bed, and could not sleep. About midnight, he heard a noise in the bedroom, and noiselessly approached the open door to see if the child was asleep. He saw Marguerite, seated before a table, and watching the glitter of something bright in her hand. The poor child could not sleep: the brilliancy of the diamonds had turned her head. She wished to feast on the brightness of the ring before separating from it, and was saying "good-by" to it as she closed the jewel-box, when Paul, who had come near her without her hearing him, snatched it from her hand to look it it.

She uttered a peevish cry. "Be silent!" said Paul, in a low tone. "Don't wake baby! Follow me to my room. If he awakes, we shall hear him. Now listen," he added, when he had led her, stupefied and cold with fright, to the adjoining room. "I don't want to scold you. You are as silly as a child of seven. Don't answer me: don't raise your voice. It is important above every thing else that baby should sleep. Why are you so terrified? What you have done is not so serious. I shall send back this trinket to the lady who gave it to you. You know well enough that you should receive no gifts except from me; and you shall not, at least unless you wish to leave me."

"Leave you!" said she, sobbing, "never. Do you want to drive me away? Then return me my ring. You surely do not want me to die of hunger?"

"Marguerite, you are silly. I do not want to leave you; but I insist that you shall cause the protection I assure you to be respected. I do not wish you to receive any presents at all; above all, I do not wish you to go in search of them."

"I did not go to his house, I solemnly declare," cried Marguerite, who had lost her presence of mind, and did not perceive the mistake Paul had made.

"*His* house!" said he, surprised. "Who is *he?*"

"Mlle. Dietrich," she replied, thinking too late of the lie that might have saved her.

"Why did you say *his?* I wish to know."

"I did not say *his;* or, if I did, it is because you confused me with your angry manner."

"Marguerite, you cannot lie: you have never lied. One single thing, but an important thing, has bound me to you, — your sincerity. Don't trifle with that, or we are both lost. Why did you say *his* instead of *her?* Answer; for I will know."

Marguerite could not resist this final appeal. She fell at the feet of Paul, and confessed every thing: she recounted all the details, showed him the marquis's letter, and the pretended bill of sale, that is to say, the gift. She wanted to tear it up; but Paul forbade her. He took possession of the deed and the jewel-box; and then, seeing that she was writhing in convulsions of grief, he raised her, and spoke gently to her. "Be calm," he said, "and comfort yourself. I forgive you. You have followed maternal instinct too far, and did not understand the injury you were doing me. It is the first time that I have had a reproach to make to you. It shall be the last, shall it not?"

"Oh, yes! For I would rather die than" —

"Don't talk of dying. You don't belong to yourself. Now go to bed. To-morrow we can speak more calmly."

Paul returned to his room, and wrote me the following letter: —

"To-morrow, when you receive this letter, my darling aunt, I shall have killed the pretended Jules Morin, or he will have killed me. You know who he is, and where Marguerite met him this morning. But you do not know that he has induced Marguerite already to accept from him the means of existence, with the expectation, announced in writing, that this consideration will induce me to marry her. I don't know whether this is intended as a provocation, or is only a stupid act of impertinence, or what part in this intrigue Mlle. Dietrich has had. I shall certainly believe that she has, with some design I cannot comprehend, brought about the meeting between Marguerite and her seducer. Whatever that design may have been, if God gives me help, for my cause is just, I shall very soon have deprived Mlle. Dietrich of her slavish cavalier, and shall have wiped out the stain which he has imprinted on my companion. While he lived, I could not legally adopt any course I might choose towards her, without making you blush before him; he dead, it will seem to you, as to me, that he never existed; and I shall have purged myself of the doubt he has cast on my honor. If fate is against me, you will receive this letter as my last testament. I bequeath and intrust to you my son: give to him the little I possess. Let his mother keep him, but do not permit her to remove him beyond your power to watch them both. She is good and devoted, but very weak. When he is old enough, send him to school. I have not reduced the slender inheritance received from my father. I know that is not enough; but you, my good angel, will do for him what you have done for me. You see now I did right to refuse the superfluities which you wished to procure for me. The money will all be necessary for my child.

"I hoped to have made a little fortune before this, and to have been restoring to you, instead of taking from you still. But life has its accidents,

which one must be always ready to meet. I have, indeed, no misgivings as to the result. Life is for me a duty rather than a pleasure. I go confidently whither I must go. You will receive this letter only in case fortune is against me, unless I should send it to you myself, to show you that, in the hour of danger, my tenderest feelings have been towards you."

He wrote Marguerite a letter still more touching, to forgive her weakness, and express his thanks for the happiness she had given him. "One day of impulse," said he, "ought not to make me forget so many days of courage and devotion, which you have contributed to our common life. Tell Pierre about me, and keep yourself pure for his sake. Do not accuse yourself of my death, for you could not have foreseen the consequences of your weakness. It is to avert them that I am going to fight, — to preserve you and my son forever from the disgrace of certain benefits received. The father exposes himself that the mother may be avenged and respected. My blessings on you both."

He thought, also, of Mme. Feron, and bequeathed her what he could. He dressed, put the two letters in his pocket, and went out before daylight without awakening any one. He went to get, for seconds, his friend the son of the publisher and another trusty friend. At seven o'clock in the morning, he caused the Marquis de Rivonnière to be aroused, and waited for him in his smoking-room.

He had not allowed his two friends to suspect that there was a prospect of an immediate duel. He had an explanation to demand: he wished it to be heard and repeated, if necessary, by tried friends.

In demanding an audience, he sent up his name. The marquis hastened to dress, and presented himself, almost joyful, at last, to have an opportunity for revenge, and to be able to tell Cesarine that he had been provoked. He even anticipated the explanation, saying to Paul, "You come here, sir, with your witnesses. That is not usual; but you do not know the rules, and it makes no difference to me. I know why you have come. It is not necessary to inform the persons whom I see with you of our affairs. You think you have reason to complain of me. I don't intend to apologize. My day and my hour shall be yours."

"I beg pardon, sir," replied Paul. "I do not suppose I am proceeding according to the rules, and you must accept my way. I want my friends to know why I expose my life and yours. I am not in a position to surround myself with mystery. Those whose good opinion I value know that I have taken for a wife — for a mistress, rather, for I will not speak in parables — a young girl, seduced at fifteen by a man who had no intention whatever of marrying her. I refrain from characterizing the conduct of this man. I did not know him. She had forgotten him. I was not jealous of the past. I was happy, for I was a father; and, whatever might be the tie which would perhaps unite us forever, fidelity promised or voluntarily preserved, I considered our union as my pleasure, my right, my duty. I am poor; I live by my work: she accepted my struggles and my poverty. Yesterday, that man wrote to my companion this letter," — and Paul read aloud the letter of the marquis to Marguerite. Then he showed the ring, and placed it, with the deed, upon the table with the greatest composure; after which, and without permitting the marquis to interrupt him, he added,

"The man who has done me the injury of believing, or at least of writing to my mistress that his presents would decide me to marry her, is you, the Marquis de Rivonnière. I suppose you recognize your signature?"

"Perfectly."

"For this gratuitous insult, you acknowledge, also, that you owe me reparation?"

"Yes, sir: I acknowledge it, and am ready to give it you."

"Ready?"

"I ask but an hour to procure my seconds."

"Very well, sir."

The marquis rang the bell, ordered his horses, finished his toilet, and returned to say to Paul that he begged him and his friends to smoke the marquis's own cigars, while they were waiting. His manners were so courteous and dignified, that, as soon as he was gone, young Latour tried to speak in his favor. He regarded the resentment and the course of Paul very proper, but he thought every thing might have been settled quite otherwise. If Paul had requested the marquis to explain that passage in his letter, perhaps the latter would have denied having intended any injurious imputation. The other friend, more reflective and more severe in his judgment, considered that the attempt to be generous towards Marguerite, and the appeal to her maternal instincts, were as injurious to Paul as the awkward and, perhaps, thoughtless allusion upon which Paul rested his provocation. "I seized upon that allusion," replied Paul, "to be brief, and to settle the grounds of the duel in a precise manner. I think I have made M. de Rivonnière understand that his action has offended me quite as much as his words."

Young Latour yielded the point, but with the hope that the marquis's seconds would assist in bringing about a peaceful settlement.

The latter were not long in appearing. It is probable that the marquis had notified them beforehand, that he expected an "affair of honor" at an early day. The hour had not elapsed, when the six parties were assembled.

M. de Rivonnière had explained every thing to his two friends. They understood his intentions. He retired to his own apartment, and Paul went into another room. The four seconds came to an agreement in ten minutes. Those for Paul maintained his right, which was not discussed. The Viscount de Valbonne, who loved the marquis as well as the point of honor, seemed for a moment to acquiesce in the desire of young Latour, who proposed that the author of the letter be requested to state the precise meaning of a certain phrase; but the other second, M. Campbel, briefly requested him to remember that the marquis had expressed very firmly, in the presence of them both, his intention to explain nothing, and not to retract the meaning of a single word written and signed by his hand.

An hour later, the two adversaries were face to face. Still an hour later, Cesarine received the following note from the confidential servant of the marquis: —

"Monsieur the marquis is mortally wounded. Will Mlle. Dietrich and Mlle. de Nermont refuse to receive his last breath? He yet has power to give me orders to express this his last wish.

"P.S. M. Paul Gilbert is with him, safe and sound.

"DUBOIS."

XVII.

STUNNED as if struck by a cannon-ball, and understanding nothing of all this, we looked at each other without speaking. Cesarine jumped to the bell, called for her carriage, and we set out without exchanging a word.

The marquis was, when we arrived, in the hands of the surgeon, who, assisted by Paul and the Viscount de Valbonne, was extracting the ball. Dubois, who was waiting for us at the door of the house, led us into the drawing-room, where young Latour told us all the circumstances preceding the duel. "I was very uneasy," he said, "because Paul had, for so long a time, been accustomed to practise with the sword and the pistol. He often said to me, 'I shall probably have to kill a man sometime during my life, if he isn't dead already.' I knew that he referred to the former lover of his mistress; for I had been in his confidence from the beginning of the connection. I had already advised him to marry her, on account of the child, whom he loved passionately. That is really the only passion I ever knew him to manifest. So it is for his son, much more than for the mother, that he fought. It had been decided that he should fire first. He aimed quickly and well. He never takes half measures, when he has resolved to act. But when he saw his adversary extended on the ground, and holding out a hand to him, he became a man again, and rushed towards him with open arms. 'You have killed me,' said the wounded man, 'and you have done your duty. You are a gallant man. I am to blame, and I have expiated my fault.' From that moment, Paul has not quitted him. He has forbidden me to notify Marguerite, who suspects nothing and can learn nothing; but he handed me, conditionally, a letter for you, which he wrote last night. As he has not been obliged to face the fire of his adversary, this letter cannot alarm you. While you are reading it, I will go and get news of the poor marquis. There is no hope at all: perhaps it is all over already."

"I wish to see him!" cried Cesarine.

Dubois, who was near by, going in stupid grief from one door to another, stopped her. "M. Nelaton will not have it," said he: "it is impossible at present. Remain here, and do not go away, Mlle. Dietrich. He said to me, in a whisper, 'To see her, and then die!'"

"Poor man! poor friend," said Cesarine, returning to me choked with sobs. "He dies by my hand! Surely he did not mean to provoke your nephew, for he could not have failed to tell me. He was sincere in wishing to repair the wrong he had done to Marguerite. If he acted clumsily, that was his worst fault. I am to blame, who would have urged him to this reparation which has cost him his life."

"Tell me, Cesarine, was it by chance that he met Marguerite yesterday at your house?"

"What has that to do with it? Are you going to scold me? Am I not already sufficiently unhappy, and sufficiently punished?"

"I desire to know all," I replied firmly. "My nephew might have been wounded, — dying, — at this moment; and I have the right to ask you. Your conscience tells you that you have provoked the disaster. You know all. Confess it! you wished to bring this about to break the tie between Paul and Marguerite."

"To prevent your nephew fr[om] marrying her, — yes, I confess th[at] to preserve him from a folly, to cau[se]

to judge the union inadmissible. But who could foresee the consequences of yesterday's meeting? Wasn't it my advice to conceal every thing from M. Gilbert? Did I not give all the reasons which enjoined silence? Could I expect that the marquis would be guilty of such deplorable awkwardness?"

"Then you planned the meeting, and confess it?"

"I know nothing absolutely: I am merely in doubt. The marquis long ago confessed to me a bad action. The name of Marguerite escaped him, and did not go out of my memory. I wished to try, — but read the letter which has been given you, then you will know what to think of the disaster."

I read Paul's letter, and let her read it, hoping that the harshness with which he expressed himself towards her would change her mind about him. It did nothing of the kind. She appeared to pay no attention to what concerned herself, and hotly praised the form, the ideas, and the sentiments of the letter. "He is a man!" she said, wiping her moist eyes. "What a brave heart! what a hero!"

The arrival of Dubois cut short her enthusiasm. The wounded man had borne the operation; M. Nelaton had gone, satisfied with his success; but the doctor would not answer for it that the marquis would live twenty-four hours. M. de Valbonne came in a moment afterwards. "They had to consent to his seeing you," he told us. "He is disturbed because I did not obey the orders given me before the duel. He has his senses; and the doctor knows that it would be wrong to oppose the will of a man who, in a moment perhaps, will have a will no more."

We followed the viscount to the marquis's room. Through the paleness of death he smiled feebly on Cesarine, and his dull look expressed recognition. Paul, who was seated at the bedside of the dying man, withdrew without appearing to notice Cesarine.

She approached the bed, and kissed the icy forehead of her unhappy slave. The doctor went into another room, leaving the marquis, Cesarine, M. de Valbonne, and myself together. Then, asking us to draw near the bedside, M. de Valboune spoke to us in a low but distinct voice. "Before the interview between M. Campbel, myself, and the seconds of M. Gilbert, Jacques de Rivonnière said to me, 'I wish no arrangement of the difficulty, for I can assure you that I have had hostile and evil intentions towards M. Gilbert. I had against him not only strong prejudices, but a species of personal hate. The step which he has taken in coming to demand satisfaction, and the manner in which he has done it, convince me that he is a man of courage and of honor, and a good fellow; for never did one resent an injury with more firmness and moderation. No insulting word was exchanged during the interview between us. I felt that he did not deserve my prejudice, and that all the blame was on my side. I do not know but I am to fight with a man who knows how to hold nothing but a pen; but I have a presentiment that he will have luck on his side, so I should be a coward if I drew back a step. You will arrange every thing without discussion; and, if fate is sternly against me, you will make my apologies to M. Paul Gilbert. You will say to him, that, after standing his fire, I should not have returned it, having very particular reasons, which he will understand, to respect his life. You will say these things in my name, if I am killed, or so disabled as not to speak. You will say them to him, in the pres-

ence of his seconds and of all the personal friends who may be assembled around me in my last moments.' Let us hope," added M. de Valbonne, "that that hour has not come, and that Jacques de Rivonnière will live. But I thought it right to fulfil his intentions, that he might rest easy; and I think I see that he approves the exactness with which I have done so."

All of us turned towards the marquis, whose eyes were open, and who made a feeble movement of approval and thanks. We all knew that we ought to leave him to absolute rest; and we left the chamber, whither Paul and the doctor returned. Such was the desire of the marquis, which he expressed by signs.

Cesarine would not quit the house. She wrote to her father to make him acquainted with the unfortunate occurrence, and to beg him to join her. As soon as he arrived, I ran to see Marguerite, to prepare her for what had taken place. Paul had sent me word by young Latour that he wished I would take this duty upon myself, and, at the same time, give Marguerite, as soon as she was re-assured on his account, the letter of pardon and love he had written during the night.

For the first time I saw Marguerite comprehend the grandeur of Paul's character; and, remembering all the sacrifices he had made for her, the truth entered her mind. I concealed from her the gravity of the marquis's condition. I deemed her already sufficiently punished and grieved. Paul's letter brought about this initiation of a child's nature into the real duties of a wife. She made me read it three or four times; then she took it, and, kneeling before me, covered it with kisses, and showered it with tears. I had to stay with her two hours to comfort her, to receive her confession, and tell her what she ought to do; for she plied me with questions as to her future conduct. "Tell me all!" she cried. "I ought not to receive letters. I ought to see no one without Paul's knowing it and consenting to it, even if it is Mlle. Dietrich."

"You ought to break off absolutely with Mlle. Dietrich above all, and today. Send back her work. I agree to procure for you work as much and as lucrative as hers. Besides, Paul must know that your work is not enough for you. Why conceal it from him?"

"That he may not kill himself with his own work."

"I will not let him kill himself. He will acknowledge that, under certain circumstances, like these, for instance, he ought to let me contribute towards the expenses of his family."

"No: he does not wish it, and he is right. Neither do I wish it any more. It is cowardly for me to be idle while he works so hard. I have accepted his poverty joyfully. The part of honor for me is to be happy as we are. He has indulged me. I am a hundred times happier with him, even in my most anxious moments, than I should be without him. I will listen no more to the complaints of the Feron. If she is no longer contented with us, let her go! I shall be able to do every thing. What does it matter that such a person as I should suffer a little? But tell me why Paul dislikes to have me receive Mlle. Dietrich's gifts. That's something I can't understand, and can't guess!".

I was much tempted to enlighten Marguerite as to the personal risks she ran in accepting the protection of Cesarine. But could one trust to t' prudence and discretion of so im

sive and wild a creature? Her jealousy awakened might lead to unforeseen complications. She hated, in imagination, the rivals whom her imagination created. On learning the name of the only person who dreamed of disputing with her the possession of her lover, she would not perhaps be able to restrain herself from expressing her anger towards that person. It was necessary to be reticent, and I was so. I remembered that Paul did not wish interference by any one in providing for him and his, since he had refused even me that privilege. Mlle. Dietrich was a stranger: he could not suffer a stranger to enter his house with such a purpose. "Give me the lace," I added, "and the money you have received in advance. I will return them. To-morrow you shall have the new order which I promise. It will pass through my hands, and no one will come here."

She resolutely made the sacrifice which I required. I ought to say indeed that she was really happy and rejoiced at owing nothing to the marquis. She approved the severity of Paul; and if she secretly mourned over any thing, for of course the child would re-appear in her, it was rather the loss of the ring than the vanished acres.

Descending the stairs I met Paul, who was coming home for a moment, promising to return quickly to the marquis. Cesarine had returned home with her father. M. de Rivonnière was no better. Every moment, final dissolution was feared. M. Dietrich would not have his daughter present at such a time.

I found Cesarine very much agitated. Headstrong in carrying out her plans, sometimes in spite of herself, she had arranged to pass an excited night in company with Paul at the bedside of the dying man. Nothing would turn her from her design; and yet she mourned the marquis sincerely. She owed to him her best care, she said, until his latest breath. She could not be compromised by this solicitude. The friends and relatives, who would surround the wounded man at that time, all knew the purity of her friendship for him, and could not regard it as strange that she should put at their service her activity, presence of mind, and well-known skill in the care of the sick. "And if they do carp at it," she added, "it is in the presence of a duty to be performed which should make one disregard their opinion, at least, unless one is conceited and cowardly. I do not comprehend why my father would not permit me to remain, even if he remained with me, which would have removed every chance for malevolent tongues. Every one knows that he is attached to M. de Rivonnière: no one has heard of their brief quarrel. I shall watch him; and if, as I expect, he returns there, he must take me with him, or I will follow, at whatever hour he may go."

She would have done so, if Dubois had not come to tell us, in the evening, that the condition of the marquis was sensibly improved. He had slept, his pulse was not so weak; and, if there was no return of the fever, he might be saved. Having kept M. de Valbonne and M. Gilbert until eight o'clock, he had begged them to leave him alone with his doctor and the family, which consisted of an aunt, a sister, and a brother-in-law, who had been notified by telegraph, and had already arrived from the country. The doctor had some hope, but only on condition of absolute and prolonged rest. The mar-

quis thanked all who had helped and visited him, but he also felt that he must see no one. Dubois promised us news three times a day, and agreed to let us know if any thing occurred during the night.

The improvement was sustained, but every one said that the cure must be very slow. The lungs had been injured; and the sick man must remain immovable, absolutely mute, guarded from the slightest excitement for several weeks, — months, perhaps.

Cesarine, seeing that fate was determined to oppose to her will, for an indefinite period, one of the chiefest obstacles, resumed her pitiless work, and fell one day unexpectedly upon the family of Paul. He was there, as she knew. She entered resolutely, without being announced. "Now that our sick man is almost saved," she began, addressing Paul, without other preamble than seating herself after pressing Marguerite's hand, "it is permissible for me to think of myself, and to come and find my personal enemy, to have satisfaction for his hatred, or at least to know the reason for it. You are that enemy, M. Gilbert, and your hostility is nothing new to me; but lately it has increased amazingly, and, if you recall the terms of a letter, written to your aunt on the night before the duel, you will understand that I do not accept those words without discussion or explanation."

"If you will permit me to insinuate a single word," replied Paul, with ironical gentleness, "you will agree with me that I ought not to awaken in my companion recollections which are painful to her, and concerning facts of which she ought to speak only to me. You will permit her to go and put the baby in his cradle, while I bear alone the weight of your wrath."

That was precisely what Cesarine desired, and Marguerite had no mistrust. On the contrary, she wished that the beautiful Dietrich, as she called her, would destroy the prejudice of Paul against her, so that she might be able to see her, and love her, without being disobedient.

"Since you render an explanation more easy," said Cesarine, when she was alone with Paul, "it will be more clear and more brief. I know that some inconceivable folly has entered the mind of my dear Pauline; and, probably, she has inoculated you with the same."

"I don't know what you mean, Mlle. Dietrich."

"Indeed! It is convenient for you not to make the confession; but I will spare you the embarrassment of it, for I can bear no longer the horrible suspicion of which I am the victim. Mlle. de Nermont, who is an angel to both of us, is not the less — you must often have perceived it, you must sometimes have suffered by it — an excitable person, uneasy, and troubled by an unhealthy solicitude for those whom she loves. The more she loves them, the more she torments them. She has fretted herself and worried about me almost seven years, desperate at seeing that I loved no one and would not marry. It has made no difference to her, that my father did not share her anxieties in that respect. If I had not had more self-command than she, I should have been really persecuted. As no one is wholly perfect, I have loved, and I do love, my Pauline, notwithstanding her little fault; and even to the present time it has not disturbed my calmness. But, as I have told you, it is getting a little troublesome, and I begin to be wearied by it. This feeling has come all of a sudden, on discover-

ing that she has communicated her silly notions to you. Now, do you understand me?"

"Not in the least."

"I beg your pardon, M. Gilbert. You do understand me; but you want me to tell you, boldly, the cause of my displeasure. That isn't generous on your part. I will tell you, then; although it must appear audacious, in the mouth of a woman speaking to a man who suspects and distrusts her. However, it may be, that, when I shall have spoken, I shall not be the more confused of the two. M. Gilbert, your aunt believes that I have an unhappy passion for you, and you believe it as well."

Paul so little expected this new kind of assault that he was fairly nonplussed. But he recovered himself very quickly, and said, "It seems to me, Mlle. Dietrich, that you plead what is false, to discover what is true. If my aunt had committed the error of which you speak, and which she has caused me to share, I should be ridiculous only in case it aroused my vanity. If, on the contrary, I had been opposed to it and mortified by it, I should only be wise. But do not be alarmed: neither my aunt nor myself has ever believed you actuated by any other passion than of making sport of, and disdaining, men simple enough to desire your notice."

"That is already a confession of the remarks about me in which you indulge here!"

"Here? Leave Marguerite out of the question, in that supposition. You have fascinated her. The poor child is, this moment perhaps, praying Heaven to reconcile us. As for myself, I shall not in any manner deny having been greatly irritated against you; and it is not necessary to suppose in me a stupid fatuity to discover the cause of my irritation. I believe, with my aunt, that you are kind and liberal for the pleasure of being so; but that does not justify you in my eyes for a defect which is to me intolerable, — the desire of serving people in spite of themselves, and of compelling them to be under obligations to you. You have lived in an atmosphere of easy benevolence and interested flattery which has intoxicated you. It is, perhaps, the mistake of a soul carried away by devotion; but when that devotion forces itself upon one, even kindness and good-will become an offence. Ever since my aunt has lived with you, you have endeavored without ceasing to compel me to be indebted to you; and my refusal has surprised you, as if it were an act of revolt. You made me feel this, by your bitter language the only time I ever went to your house; and in that single interview I fathomed you, and judged you better than my aunt has ever been able to do. You tried to persuade me that my pride had caused you great disquiet; you played a little comedy in doubtful taste; and even suffered a little in your own pride, at seeing that I did not take your acting in earnest. You have forgotten that slight vexation of the first interview, I make no doubt; but your queenly caprice never completely leaves you. You wished to force me to prostrate myself like the others, and you have tried to relieve me of my poor companion. You would have succeeded, if I had not been very much on my guard; and, now, I tell you this, Mlle. Dietrich: I will never be indebted to you for any thing; you shall not lighten my labors; you shall not give bread to my child; you shall not be his physician; you shall not possess yourself of my home, my secrets, my confidence,

my affections. I will not conceal my nest upon another bough to guard it from your alms: I will send your gifts back persistently; and, when you bring them in person, I will tell you what I tell you now. If you do not respect others, at least respect yourself, and come no more."

Any one but Cesarine would have been confounded; but she had been prepared for any thing. She had armed herself for the battle with extraordinary courage. Instead of appearing humiliated, she put on her expression of ingenuous surprise. She was silent for a moment, and made no movement towards departure. "You have just spoken to me very severely," said she, with that marvellous sweetness of voice and look which constituted her most powerful weapon; "but I cannot wish it otherwise, for you have done me a service. I came here in spite and in anger. I shall go away thoughtful and sad. Let us see: is that you have said all true? Am I a child spoiled by the happiness of doing good? Can devotion be in us an element of corruption? They used to say that pride is the virtue of saints. In seeking to sanctify my life by charity, shall I lose modesty and delicacy? It must be, or I should not have wounded you so cruelly. Between the pride which offers and the pride which refuses, is there no mean, which neither of us have known how to keep? It may be possible: I shall think about it, M. Gilbert. I am very glad that you have given me this light. Ah! they never tell the truth to us who are fortunate in our riches. Now I understand that I have exceeded my privilege, in wishing to interest myself in the son of my friend in spite of her. I thought it was personal dislike that actuated her; and, possibly, my vanity has been wounded. Be tranquil, hereafter, so far as I am concerned. I will proceed no further without severe self-examination. I will have no more the coquetry of my virtue. I will repress my sympathies. I will learn discretion. Pardon me the anxiety I have caused you, M. Gilbert. Undertake to satisfy Pauline, who needs comfort, since she imagines — oh! upon that last point defend me a little, I beg you. Tell her not to take her dreams for realities. Tell Marguerite that I desire the success of her most cherished wishes, for — You have given me a good and useful lesson, M. Paul; but you ought also to recognize the fact that you may sometimes receive good advice. Here is mine: marry Marguerite, and legitimize your child; you have acquired the right by arms, and your right implies a duty."

"And you, Mlle. Dietrich," replied Paul, "receive also, before we quit each other's presence, a piece of advice as valuable as yours. I know, from the friends of M. de Rivonnière, that you have made him very unhappy. Repair all his wrongs by marrying him, for they hope to save his life."

"I will think about it: thank you, again," she replied, with grace and cordiality. She went out, and closed the door behind her; forbidding Paul to accompany her, with so much ease and such suave dignity that he remained mute with surprise and hesitation. He was not conquered, he was tamed. He thought he need fear her no more, and would not have been sorry to observe her still longer in the new character which she had just taken.

He spoke of her gently to Marguerite; and, without removing the command which he had imposed on her, he allowed her to hope that some time

she might again see "her beautiful Dietrich." He had, perhaps, a certain pleasure in repeating this phrase, since, for the first time, Cesarine, modest and gentle, had seemed to him really beautiful.

XVIII.

THAT day Cesarine had hit the mark. She had purged herself of the ridicule attaching to unrequited love. She had relieved herself of that humiliation which gave too much force to the rebellion of her antagonist. She had diminished his own confidence in himself. Paul now had doubts as to the clearness of my judgment. He thought, perhaps, that I had been a little eager to put him on his guard against an imaginary peril. He was suspicious of my maternal solicitude, and thought he saw in it a certain exaggeration, which was not without danger for himself. Therefore he forbade Marguerite to mention to me Cesarine's visit, so as not to alarm me any further. M. de Rivonnière seemed to be in a state of convalescence, when a serious accident again placed his life in danger. Then it was that Cesarine conceived a most unexpected project, of which she only spoke to me when the thing was practically decided.

"You must know," said she, "that within a fortnight I shall probably be Marchioness de Rivonnière. Dear me! Don't go into hysterics. It isn't very surprising. It is, indeed, a logical consequence of events. Let me tell you what has happened in the last three days.

"M. de Valbonne, who is the best friend of the marquis, came to see me, in his name, and said to me, 'There is no longer any chance for self-deception: a consultation of the first physicians and surgeons of France has decided this morning that the disease is incurable. Jacques may live three months or longer. This conclusion has been concealed from his family, and revealed only to myself and Dubois, with the advice, that, if the sick man has any business to be transacted, he should be cautiously led to decide what he would do.

"'Precautions were needless. Jacques had felt that he had received a mortal wound from the first day, and he had steadily looked his approaching death in the face with stoical courage. At the first words which I ventured to speak to him, he took my hand, and pressed it in a way to signify, "Yes, I am ready;" for you must know, that, by very slight signs and a simple movement of the lips or cheeks, I am able to guess all his wishes, and even to read his thoughts. I asked him if he had any particular wishes. He said *yes* with his fingers, pressing them upon mine, and then with his lips, but without making any sound, "Will — Cesa" —

"'"You wish," said I, "to make your will in favor of Cesarine Dietrich?"

"'He made a very positive sign of assent. "She has no need of your fortune and will not accept it."

"'"Yes: marriage *in extremis*."

"'I made him define his resolution, translating it thus: "You think she will accept your name and your title in your last moments?"

"'"Yes."

"'"No human science can make it certain that the supposed last hour of a sick man may not be the first of returning health. Mlle. Dietrich has not been willing to be your companion in life. Will she run the risk of bind-

ing herself to you, in expectation of an always-uncertain death?"

"'I spoke thus to give him a hope he did not wish to entertain, and which I did not have. He looked towards my hat and the door.

"'"You wish me to go and ask her at once?" He made an impatient sign of affirmation; and here I am. But, that you may decide how to act in this difficult case, I have brought you the signed opinion of the scientific men. You see that the unhappy man is condemned; and that, in accepting the offer of poor Jacques, you only become his wife in the eyes of the law.'

"I asked M. de Valbonne why Jacques had this singular desire to give me his name. 'As for his fortune,' I added, 'I would not deprive his family of it, being already rich enough myself; and the titles of "my lady," and "marchioness" have not the least attraction to a plebeian girl, who is contented with the position birth has given her.'

"'You are wrong to disdain the advantages which count for much with the world,' replied the friend of Jacques. 'You love independence, brilliancy, and power. Your actual importance, which is considerable, would be increased tenfold by the position which is offered you.'

"'It is not of that I should think. It is rather of the good I may be able to do our poor friend. You know all his thoughts. He pretended to me to be insensible to the ridicule to which his position of perpetual suitor subjected him. He deceived me, perhaps?'

"'He was cruelly sensible of it. The intensity of his suffering shows you the persistency of his passion. I am certain that death would be less bitter, if he had the reparation, which it is in your power to give him, in the eyes of the world.'

"'In that case I accept.'

"'That is noble and grand in you! Shall I go and find your father?'

"'We will go together. I am sure of his consent.'

"We went and spoke to father. He yielded, for reasons other than mine. He believed that my reputation had suffered by the too-apparent assiduity of the marquis, and that my complaisance in allowing it to the exclusion of many other suitors had caused it to be said that I was guarding my independence at the cost of my purity. I cared nothing for that. There is no one whom the calumny of the shallow will not attack. When one is pure, one dances on these mud volcanoes. But my father is tormented by it all. That's the more reason why I should yield. Now, my Pauline, since this is a good action, I ought not to hesitate; isn't that your opinion?"

It was not, altogether, my opinion. I found in this good action something ferocious. Cesarine must tremble at the least manifestation of improvement in her husband. If, contrary to all predictions, he should get well, would she not hate him? and if, without getting well, he should linger for several years, would she not regret the ungrateful task which had been imposed on her?

She was angry at my doubts, and answered me haughtily that I had never known, never esteemed her. "This is the result," she said, "of my dreams, which I did wrong to cherish for the pleasure I had in discussion and in teasing you. You have ended, by persuading yourself that I wished to marry your nephew; and now you believe, that, if I marry another, my soul will be lacerated with regrets. My good Pauline, this romance has excited you: you love romances. But this or

has lasted too long: I am weary of it. If you need facts to re-assure you, I permit you to admit that I have always loved M. de Rivonnière, and that I had the right to make him wait."

As soon as she attempted to annul by a calmly-audacious denial, all that she had said to her father and myself, I had nothing to reply. The banns were published. I informed Paul of it, and he manifested no surprise. He saw M. de Valbonne often: that gentleman had conceived a strong friendship for him, and manifested entire confidence in him. He was, therefore, informed of every thing, and approved Cesarine's course. He told me then of the explanation to which he had come with her, and gave me to understand that I was partly to blame for the ridiculous part he had played towards her. I was so mortified as to be almost angry with myself, — persuaded myself that Cesarine had been only making sport of my terror, when she had only had a passing liking for Paul, and had really, all the time, desired the marquisate of M. de Rivonnière.

So she gained a victory all along the line. No one had any more suspicion of her, — at home, in Paul's house, or in society.

The extreme weakness of the marquis disappeared, during the time consumed in the necessary delays. The illness had taken a new turn. The lung was cured: he was allowed to talk a little, and to pass some hours daily on a couch. The malady took a mysterious character, which baffled science. His blood decomposed. His head was perfectly sound, notwithstanding the continued fever; but dropsy appeared, the stomach acted no more, and his nights were sleepless. He showed much impatience and excitement. No one made any other effort than to guess what he wanted, and to humor his whims. His relatives had lost hope, and no longer tried to control him.

When the approaching marriage was announced, his sister and his brother-in-law, who had expected the marquis's estate for their children, were angry, and spoke ill of Cesarine. She heard of it, and re-assured them by causing it to be stipulated, in the marriage-contract, that she accepted from the marquis only his name. She would occupy his house only, in case, after his death, it should please her to do so. From that moment, the marquis's family belonged, body and soul, to Mlle. Dietrich. Society was, in a moment, filled with the fame of her merit and her glory.

The night before the signature of this contract, — it was in June, 1863, — there had been another secret contract concluded between Cesarine and the marquis, in presence of M. de Valbonne, M. Dietrich, M. Karl Dietrich, his brother, M. Campbel, and myself; a strange, unprecedented contract, which could have for security only the honor of the marquis, and his respect for his sworn word. On the one hand the marquis, with rare generosity, required that Cesarine should not cease to dwell with her father. He would not have her witness his sufferings and agony. He permitted her only a short daily visit, and a look of affection at the hour of his death. On the other hand, in the improbable event of his getting well, he renounced all right to constrain his wife to live with him, and even the right of seeing her at her own house, if she was not willing. The two clauses were read, approved, and signed. We separated immediately afterwards. The marquis had still enough pride to desire not to be seen long in his weak and dying state.

As he was not in a condition to be

moved, it was decided that the marriage should take place at his house. The mayor of the *arrondissement*, with whom they had good relations, promised to come there in person, and the pastor of the parish made the same promise. This was the only cause of grief to the sister and aunt of the marquis. They had hoped that Cesarine would abjure Protestantism. The marquis had opposed this, with all the energy of which he was capable, to every one who made such a proposition. He had declared that he was neither Protestant nor Catholic, and that he accepted the marriage ceremony which best responded to the religious views of his wife. To tell the truth, Cesarine was as undecided as he; but the Protestant marriage constituted a triumph over a family which she wished to conquer by firmness, and rule by disinterestedness.

Only the most intimate friends, and the nearest relatives, of the parties were invited to the ceremony. The marquis's wish was that Paul and the Viscount de Valbonne should be his witnesses.

We were to meet at noon at Rivonnière's residence. Cesarine arrived a little before the time. She was ravishingly beautiful, in a dress as rich in reality as it was simple in appearance. She retained her usual quiet and charming bearing on grand occasions. She wore, for jewels, only a single row of great pearls as a necklace. Her *fiancé* had sent her, the night before, a magnificent casket of jewels, which she held in her hand. He had not appeared as yet. His physician had required, in order that he might not be too much fatigued, that he should not leave his room until the last moment.

Cesarine went directly to Mme. de Montherme, her future sister-in-law, who entered the same moment as herself. She gave her the jewel-casket, saying, "Take this while we are here, and hide it. It contains your family diamonds, which I restore to you. You know I want only your friendship."

When Paul entered with M. de Valbonne, I watched Cesarine, and discovered that almost imperceptible contraction of the nostrils which betrayed to me her restrained emotion. She was alone with me in a window-recess. Paul came to salute us. "Now," said she to him with a smile, "your enemy is no more. You have no reason to bear ill-will towards the Marchioness de Rivonnière. Will you give me your hand?" And, when Paul had touched that white-gloved hand, she added, "I give you a good example, and get married. I marry him who has loved me a long time. I know some one to whom you owe more" —

Paul interrupted her. "I see that you are still Mlle. Dietrich," said he; "for you are beginning again to attempt to benefit people in spite of themselves."

"This, then, would be in spite of you? I didn't think you so averse to a good resolution."

"There again, there always, it is Mlle. Dietrich who speaks. But the hour of transformation draws near. The Marchioness de Rivonnière will not be so curious."

"But, if she receives the lessons which are given her with as much sweetness as Mlle. Dietrich, she will be perfect?"

"She will be perfect. No one can doubt that any longer." He bowed to her, and moved away. This short conversation had been held with an appearance of mutual good wishes and good humor. Paul seemed completely

reconciled. He really was so, or desired nothing more. As for her, one might have been satisfied that there was nothing more or less in her heart for him than for an ordinary friend.

Those present, who had not seen the marquis for some time, did not believe that he was so seriously ill. Some of them whispered to their neighbors that he had exaggerated his illness in order to make Mlle. Dietrich pity him, and cause her to consent to a marriage at the point of death, when he was likely to live. These opinions were changed, and hilarity gave place to a sort of shudder, when the marquis appeared, cautiously trundled in by the servants, extended upon a reclining chair. He might have been able to stand for a moment, but at the cost of exposing his dropsical condition; and he could not walk. He was clean shaved and neatly dressed, and the lower part of his body was concealed under a rich drapery. He was fine-looking still; but he was frightfully pale. His pinched nostrils and hollow eyes changed his expression, which had assumed a sort of menacing severity. Cesarine shuddered an instant as she pressed my arm. She had been more interested in him as a sick man. This dress for the ceremony did not become a man nailed to his seat, and gave him a ghostly appearance. M. Dietrich led his daughter to the marquis, who kissed her hand; but it cost him an effort to carry it to his lips. His hands were heavy and half-paralyzed.

The mayor took his place, and proceeded with the accustomed formalities. Cesarine seemed to exercise complete control over her emotions; but, when it was necessary to pronounce the fatal "Yes," she was agitated, and seized with a stammering habit, to which, under great emotion, she was subject. The mayor, who had given all the usual cautions with deliberate gravity, would proceed no further until she had recovered herself. He had not heard the definitive *yes;* and he must hear it. The bride seemed ill; but she would be allowed a few moments to recover.

"It is not necessary," said she, firmly. "I am not indisposed; but I am excited. I answer *yes*, three times *yes*, if you desire."

What was passing in her mind?

During the short address of the magistrate, M. de Valbonne, from behind the sofa on which Cesarine had dropped, whispered something rapidly in her ear, — something which acted on her like a galvanic battery. She arose as if possessed by angry passion, bound herself irrevocably in a fit of despair, and before the conclusion of the ceremony had recovered her calm demeanor, and her sweetly-tender bearing.

The clergyman proceeded immediately to celebrate the religious marriage, in which some ladies present would only assist by remaining at the other end of the room, and whispering among themselves. Cesarine was displeased by this childish conduct, and begged the pastor to request silence, which he did with moderation but firmness. There was silence, and this time Cesarine's *yes* was heard clearly.

What, then, had M. de Valbonne said to her? Three words only, "*Paul is married!*" It was indeed true. While the newly-married couple were receiving the compliments of those who were present, my nephew came towards me, and said, "My good aunt, you must pardon me once more. I married Marguerite yesterday at the mayor's office. I will tell you why."

He could proceed no further, for Cesarine approached, smiling and almost radiant. "Your hand once more," said she to Paul. "The Marchioness de Rivonnière admires and esteems you. Will you now be her friend, and permit her to go and see your wife?"

"With much pleasure," said Paul, kissing her hand.

"Well," said he, after she had turned to speak to other friends, "you were mistaken, aunt, and so was I, very much, and very unjustly. She is an excellent person, and a woman of heart."

"Tell me about your marriage."

"No, not here. I will go to see you this evening."

"At the Dietrichs'?"

"Why not? Shall you be in your room?"

"Yes, at nine o'clock."

The guests, previously warned by the physician, took their leave. The marquis seemed so weary that M. Dietrich and his daughter felt not a little uneasiness at leaving him. "No," said he to them in a whisper, "you must go in sight of all the people. The arrangement between us requires it. Perhaps I shall call you back in an hour to see me die." And as Cesarine shuddered, "Do not pity me," he added, so that she alone heard: "I shall die proud and happy, fully convinced that it would be harder for me to live."

"That is a speech more cruel than death itself," said Cesarine. "You suspect me always" —

He, speaking more softly still, interrupted her. "You will be free to-morrow, Cesarine. Do not tell a lie to-day."

Thus they parted; and, when evening was come, he did not die. He was sleeping; and Dubois came to tell us not to be at all uneasy on his account, for he was no worse than in the morning. "Only," added Dubois, "in order to give pleasure to his sister, he has received the sacraments of the church."

"What do you say?" cried Cesarine. "You are mistaken, Dubois."

"No, Madame la Marquise, my master is philosophical: he believes in nothing. But his position has its duties. He did not wish, that, on account of his marriage, he should be supposed a Protestant; and he has caused M. de Valbonne to send to the newspapers the information that he has conformed to the requirements of religion.

"It is well, Dubois: please to tell him that he has done well."

"What a contradictory and inconsistent man!" she said to me, as soon as Dubois had gone. "This atheistic superstition would fill me with prejudice against him, if he had not, at this moment, a title to absolution by his friends rather than at the hands of a priest. He does not know what he is doing."

"Good heavens! how you hate him, my poor child! He will do well to die quickly."

"Why? He may live now as long as he pleases. I am no more capable of love or hate. Every thing is of no consequence to me. Do not suppose I regret the step I have taken. You know very well that he has obtained neither my heart nor my person. If, contrary to all expectation, the marquis should recover his health, I would belong to him no more than in the past."

"Will he have sufficient control over his passions to keep his word towards you?"

"The promise he has signed is worth more than you think. It will assist me in getting a legal separation."

"Have you already taken legal advice?"

"Certainly."

We exchanged not a word about Paul. She received the visits of her friends; and I went to my own room to pass the rest of the evening with my nephew, who was awaiting me.

"Listen now," said he, "to what has happened, which I have kept from you more than a fortnight. It is well to state the terms on which I found myself with M. de Rivonnière after the duel. He had accused me in his own mind, and probably, also, to his friends, of aspiring to the hand of Mlle. Dietrich. Seeing me defend my honor, in the name of my mistress and my child, he repented of his injustice, and esteemed me so much the more when he saw in me no longer a rival. Nevertheless, he had still a little uneasiness in regard to the future; for he thought of the future during the few days he seemed to be getting better. He sent M. de Valbonne to say to me, 'You have almost killed my best friend. You are very sorry, I know, and would gladly restore him to life. Perhaps you can. The woman whom he loves passionately loves another. Rightly or wrongly, he imagines you to be that person. If you were married, she would forget you. Do you not intend to marry her whose part and cause you have so loyally and energetically taken?' I replied that the fancy of Mlle. Dietrich always seemed to me a bad joke, repeated in good faith by persons in whom the marquis was wrong to place confidence.

"'But if these persons have not been deceived?' resumed M. de Valbonne.

"'I should still have but one word in reply. I am not in love with Mlle. Dietrich, and am not ambitious.'

"'That simple answer, coming from you, is sufficient for us,' replied the marquis. 'Now will you permit us to express to you some solicitude in regard to Marguerite?'

"'Now that all injuries are so bloodily expiated, I allow all questions. I have always intended to marry Marguerite as soon as I had avenged her. I therefore mean to marry her as soon as I have induced Mlle. de Nermont, my aunt and adopted mother, to consent to the union. She is already partially prepared, but not fully. In a few days, probably, she will give her consent.'

"'The marquis believes, however, that she will not yield so easily, on account of Marguerite's family.'

"'Yes, on account of Marguerite's mother, an infamous wretch. But that mother is dead. I received the news this morning; and the principal objection in my aunt's eyes and my own is removed.'

"'Then,' replied the viscount, 'do what your conscience dictates. You are in the presence of a man whom you have placed between life and death, whom anxiety and uneasiness cause more injury than his wound, and who might have a chance to live if he were assured of two things, both depending upon your course: reparation given, and her future secured, to the woman whose treatment by himself occasions him deep remorse; liberty, reason, restored to the troubled mind of the woman he loves, notwithstanding the injury she has done him. Do not answer; reflect.'

"I reflected. I said to myself that I need consult no one, not even you, before doing my duty. I wrote to M. de Valbonne, the next day, that the banns had been published at the mayor's office. He hastened to my office,

embraced me, and begged me to leave Cesarine in ignorance of what had been done. In order to do so, it must be kept from you, my good aunt; for Mlle. Dietrich is curious, and takes you unawares. Now, pardon me, approve what I have done, and tell me that you love me still; for this is not a sudden step I have taken: it is a sacrifice to the dignity and peace of mind of others, — of my child first. You know that I have never allowed myself to be governed by passion, and that I have no passion for Marguerite. It is, also, a sacrifice for the sake of a man whom I should have done right to kill, but whom I am not the less unhappy at having killed; for he will not recover, I am sure, and his wife will very shortly be a widow. Finally, it is a sacrifice to the dignity of Mlle. Dietrich. Her pretended liking for me, of which I have always made sport, was, nevertheless, a settled conviction in the mind of M. de Rivonnière, thanks to his imprudence in confiding his jealousy to others than M. de Valbonne. If I were not married, it would certainly be said that the beautiful marchioness was waiting for her widowhood to marry me. False rumors travel quickly, and the truth follows slowly. I have been very cruel to that poor lady, whom I ought to have pardoned a momentary coquetry, followed by childish endeavors to relieve my wants. All this is forever effaced by the double marriage. I have discovered that your ward has real merits, which are a counterpoise to her defects. I suppose she has abandoned forever her intention of benefiting me. She will find so many others, who will yield to her benevolence with good grace! Besides, I am no longer an interesting object to her. My employer has just made me partner in a certain branch of the business, which was worth nothing, and which I have made valuable. My income is, therefore, altogether sufficient for the necessities of my little family. Marguerite is happy, the Feron repentant and pardoned; little Pierre has recovered his appetite, and has two teeth already. Kiss me, aunty; tell me that you are satisfied with me, as I am with myself."

I kissed him, and told him I approved his conduct; concealing from him the secret sorrow that his marriage with a girl so little adapted to him, however devoted she might be, had caused me. I concealed from him, equally, the pleasure which I experienced in seeing him delivered from the misfortune of Cesarine's liking. He would no longer believe that there was any danger in the past. I believed him preserved from it in the future. We were both mistaken.

The next day a very marked improvement manifested itself in the condition of the marquis; and his sister did not fail to attribute the miracle to the power of the priest. Cesarine and her father saw him for a moment, as had been agreed. He refused to allow them to prolong their short interview; after which he called M. de Valbonne to him, and laid before him the condition of his mind. "I think, I feel," said he, "that I shall live; but my recovery will be slow, and I do not wish to be an object of terror and disgust to my wife. I would rather only see her when I have completely recovered my health. To that end, it is best that she should go and pass the summer in the country."

"Are you still jealous?"

"No, that is all over. Cesarine is too proud to dream of a married man; and that man is too honorable to be-

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tray me. I am certain that she will love me, if I am not a ghost of frightful appearance, whatever pains she may take to conceal her love. She would not leave Paris, if I should remain. People would blame her. It is, therefore, necessary that I should go myself. I must go for a year, at least. They must advise me to travel. Tell the doctor I wish it. He will make the objection that I am still too weak. Reply to him, that I am resolved to risk all, for all."

The doctor thought the idea of his patient a good one. The sight of his wife threw him into dangerous excitement; while absence from her, a change of air and of circumstances, alone could save him. To move him, however, seemed impossible; and, if undertaken at once, he would answer for nothing.

M. de Valbonne was full of energy, and regarded irresolution as the sole cause of all non-success in life. He insisted; and the removal was resolved upon. The decision was announced forthwith to Cesarine, who offered to accompany her husband. He refused; and poor Rivonnière, bundled up in a bed in a wagon, departed for Aix-les-Bains early in July. From thence he would, in case of improvement, proceed further. To travel to health, or to death, was his idea. M. de Valbonne accompanied him, with a special physician.

Cesarine remained a few days longer in Paris. Her father was impatient to return to Mireval; but she compelled him to wait. Before withdrawing from society for six months, it was necessary for him to explain to every one, in a few words at least, that situation which seemed so strange, and ade so much talk. At bottom e found, in the midst of secret chagrin, some childish pleasure in her position of marchioness, and in showing to the aristocracy of birth that she had honored instead of disfigured it, by entering the ranks of the nobility. She put on an air of resigned and courageous widowhood, which became her very well. She had, she said, but very little hope of preserving her husband; she had done all she could to preserve his life. It was not a caprice of her generosity, — an act dictated by momentary compassion. She had always considered and treated him as her best friend. She had always said, that, if she determined to marry, it should be him alone. There was nothing astonishing, in her having accepted his name; but she had accepted nothing else, and she wished it to be plainly understood. She repeated this discourse, in every possible form, to several hundred persons, at least, in the space of a week; and, when she saw that the report had gained sufficient currency, she remarked to me, "There, I can do no more. All Europe knows why I am Marchioness de Rivonnière. I alone do not know."

I understood the hint; but I pretended not. I knew very well why she had consented to the marriage. She did not reckon on Paul's marriage: she wished to re-assure him, and lead him on by her confidence and friendship. She had calculated that six months, at most, would be sufficient for her purposes. She had made every arrangement to estrange Paul and Marguerite, while pretending to attach the latter to herself. Paul had hated the woman who offered herself: he would fall in love with her who held aloof, so as to give the advantage to another. She had succeeded in destroying his prejudice, but not in preventing his marriage; and she had no alternative

but to appear charmed at the price at which she had obtained this result.

But how cruel was that price, and how she cursed it under her pretence of royal firmness! I admired the force of her character; for I alone could surprise her, in moments of despair, weeping secret tears. Her father suspected nothing. He could prevent nothing, amend nothing. It was henceforth useless to say any thing to him. The rest of the family rejoiced at the high position acquired by Cesarine; and Helmina gave twenty needless orders every day to have the pleasure of saying, "Let madame la marquise know!" Her young Dietrich cousins shared this vanity to some extent. The elder was married, the younger betrothed; while little Irma would say, "My sisters marry commoners; and they are furious because they must. As for me, I will have a nobleman, or I won't marry."

Bertrand said absolutely nothing. He knew the people too well. But when Cesarine, after declaring that she was hungry, pushed away her plate without eating a mouthful; or when, after having given orders for her carriage, sent word, with a spiritless air, that the horses should be unharnessed, he looked at me, and his cold eyes said, "You should have done her will: she will die for having done the will of others."

XIX.

WE left Paris at last on the 15th of July, without Cesarine's having seen either Paul or Marguerite. Mireval was, by the elegant comfort of the château, the beauty of the lakes and the shades, a place of delight; and it was but a few hours distant from Paris. M. Dietrich expended large sums to improve its productiveness, — in fact, much more than he received from it; and he made these sacrifices purely for the love of science, and the benefit of the inhabitants. He was really the benefactor of the region; and yet, if the charm and the skill of his daughter had been lacking to him, he would not have been liked. His excessive modesty, his absolute indifference to all personal ambition, imprinted upon his language and his manners a cold dignity, which might be taken by prejudiced persons for the stiffness of pride. He had been at first disliked as much through fear as through jealousy; and, since his scrupulous integrity had secured him respect, his devotion to the interests of the community had brought him esteem. But he lacked affability, and was not in the least in sympathy with the common people. He did not desire to be. Seeking no reward whatever, he found one in the success of his efforts to combat ignorance and prejudice. He was indeed a worthy man, of practical and real merit. His lack of popularity was the best proof of it.

Cesarine, however, was disturbed at seeing commonplace and selfish notabilities preferred to him. She had urged him very strongly to become a candidate for deputy, which he opposed, saying that certain victories were worth all the efforts of a serious mind, but that triumphs of ambition were scanty and vain.

Nevertheless, a local question of great interest to the welfare of the farmers of the department presenting itself about this time, he allowed himself to be conquered by the duty of combating evil; and, at the risk of

defeat, he permitted himself to be proposed Cesarine undertook to supply the burning zeal which he lacked. She needed, perhaps, a contest to distract herself from her own secret cares. Her marriage gave her the right to engage in it with a much more pronounced activity; and M. Dietrich, who for a long time had resisted her omnipotence only through the fear of the world's opinion, abandoned thenceforth to the Marchioness de Rivonnière the government of the house and of the family, — a subordination which he had endeavored to render less apparent when it was in the hands of Mlle. Cesarine. The numerous tenants upon the estate of the marquis, who had much reason to praise the indulgent policy of his agent, were filled with fear on learning of the marriage, and the absence, for an indefinite period, of their landlord. They were afraid of falling under the supervision of M. Dietrich, and of having to give an account for very many abuses. When they learned and saw that Cesarine pretended to no authority, that she would not even visit the farm and château of her husband, there was a great outburst of gratitude and joy. From that moment she could dispose of their votes as of her own tenants'.

Mireval had been theretofore a solitude. M. Dietrich had reserved that corner of the earth for himself, to be free from the noise of the world. Cesarine, respecting his wishes, had appeared to appreciate on her own account the useful and salutary leisure of the season of annual seclusion. Now she declared that it was necessary to sacrifice it, and open all the doors to the throng of voters, of every rank and opinion. M. Dietrich agreed with a sigh, and the young marchioness organized a series of incessant receptions.

I had liked Mireval very much. I liked it no longer when I saw it converted into a place for show and noise. In every collection of humanity mediocrity rules. Those daily dinners with covers laid for fifty, those meetings in the park, that perpetual merry-making, were odious to me. I could not refuse to aid Mlle. Helmina in her housekeeping duties. Her activity was no longer all-sufficient. The marquisate which had fallen to her niece turned her head: she could now find nothing magnificent or ingenious enough to sustain the lustre of a position so exalted. I was no longer on terms of intimacy with Cesarine. Since her marriage and Paul's, her lips were sealed; nothing could be inferred from her manner. She was not well, which was the only indication I could find of a great deception courageously borne out. I ought to say, that, during this period of efforts to forget her wound or to conceal it, she was really the strong woman which she made it a matter of pride to be; and that while admiring her I felt my tender feelings towards her revive, as well as the grief which her own suffering caused me, and the devotion which inclined me to alleviate it by sacrificing to her my own wishes and my own freedom.

I hardly had time to write to Paul, and he wrote very seldom to me. His work had increased since the change in his position. His wife was happy, his child was in good health. He had nothing, he said, to complain of. M. de Valbonne wrote to M. Dietrich once a week to inform him of the alternate improvements and relapses in the condition of M. de Rivonnière. He bore transportation better than rest, and was going all over Switzerland by short journeys. Cesarine

appeared to take much interest in these letters, but M. Dietrich alone replied to them. The marchioness could hardly conceal the intense aversion which M. de Valbonne had inspired in her.

After a contest of two months, Cesarine triumphed, and her father was elected by a large majority. She had brought to bear a ceaseless activity and a delicate skill, which were the theme of universal admiration. A few days of this triumph did not intoxicate M. Dietrich, but began to undeceive the marchioness; for very many of those whom she had defeated with so much difficulty showed that they were not worth the trouble, and that they had hardly more heart than votes. Then she began to feel very weary and very much depressed. M. Dietrich, who had never seen her sick since her childhood, was frightened, and carried her off to Paris for medical advice.

We returned, therefore, to the house in town to find it very quiet and secluded; for all fashionable Paris was in the country or at the sea-side. We arrived in mid-September, and it was still very hot. The marquis was decidedly better. Cesarine saw the time of her deliverance rapidly receding; but she seemed altogether resigned to her lot, and her father hoped that she would yet have some happiness in her domestic relations. The engagement which his son-in-law had entered into, never to claim her as his wife, seemed to the father an act of delicacy from which the marchioness would release him, on seeing him completely restored, and still loving her.

The consultation of the physicians dissipated our fears. The only trouble with Cesarine was the temporary exhaustion caused by her great exertions. She was advised to pass the rest of the summer reclining on a couch in a darkened room, riding out a little before sunset, to take iron and quinine, and to retire early. She submitted with indifference, caused large numbers of books to be brought to her, and plunged into them, as a person abstracted from all outward happenings. Then she took notes, made little heaps of her manuscript, and, one day said to me, "You do not know what I have been doing in these days of leisure and reflection. I have written a book! It is not a romance: don't be too much elated with the prospect of reading it. It is a heavy and tedious resumé of some philosophical theories of the day. It is good for nothing, but it has occupied and interested me. To read much, and to write a little, is an outlet for the activity of my mind. But in order that it may really do me good, I ought to know whether it has been worth the trouble of writing it, and is worthy of being read. I have written to your nephew to pray him to give me his opinion; and I have sent him my manuscript, as it is his business to judge of this sort of thing. I don't expect it to be printed: I only intend to find out if I can go on without throwing away my time."

"And he has answered" —

"Nothing: only that he has examined my work; that he has not time to write a criticism of it in the form of a letter, but that he can do much better in fifteen minutes of conversation; and that he holds himself subject to my commands on the day and hour I shall fix."

"And you have fixed" —

"To-day. I am expecting him now."

As usual, Cesarine had notified me

at the last moment. Any reflection about it was out of the question. It was two o'clock, and Paul was very punctual.

I watched the marchioness, in vain, when he entered. She betrayed no emotion whatever. She did not even reproach him for not having kept his promise of calling upon her. She did not excuse herself for not keeping hers to visit Marguerite. He spoke only of literature and philosophy, as if they were resuming an interview interrupted by a separation. As for him, calm as a judge who does not permit personal feelings of any kind to interfere with the discharge of his duties, he thus gave his judgment on her book: "You have done, without seeming to be aware of it, a remarkable work, but not without its faults. On the contrary, the faults are numerous. However, as there is one essential quality, — independence in the point of view and an appreciation more than ingenious; an appreciation, very profound, of the question you have treated, — I seriously advise you to strike out the rather puerile details, and bring to light the entire structure of your thoughts. The examination of effects is done with the hand of a scholastic, and takes infinitely too much room. The judgment of causes is masterly, and you have passed that over with too much modesty and self-distrust. Do your work over again; sacrifice three-quarters of it, and make an entire book of the last quarter. I answer for it, that it will deserve to be published, and that it will not be useless. As for style, it is correct and clear, though a little timid. I should wish it to have the energy, cold, if you will, but powerful, of a conviction which you cherish."

"I cherish no conviction," replied Cesarine. "I have done this work with complete independence."

"Independence," said he, "is a passion, and deserves to take a place among the noblest passions. It is, indeed, the ruling passion in the most exalted minds of our time. It is, in a new form, the passion of liberty of conscience, which has excited the greatest contests in which your Protestant fathers engaged, madame."

"You are right," said she. "You open the window, and let the light penetrate within me. I thank you: I will follow your advice. I shall rewrite my book, and you shall see that I understand you."

He was going to withdraw, but she retained him. "You would like, perhaps, to chat with your aunt. I have something to do in the house. If I do not see you again here, thank you, and good-by." She held out her hand to him with cordial grace, adding, "I have not asked you for news of your family, for I have it from Pauline. She will tell that I inquire often."

It was useless to tell Paul that she never inquired. It was no longer for me to warn him of dangers, of which I thought it my duty to advise him the year before. I must, on the contrary, let him believe that they were imaginary, and be contented with the ridicule which that misapprehension cost me. I only thought it my duty to inquire if he did not fear to awaken the jealousy of the marquis by coming to see his wife.

"I am so far from wishing to inspire him with jealousy," he replied, "that I had not even thought of him. But, if you fear any thing of the sort, I can easily refrain from coming any more, and can make you the medium of communications which must take place be-

tween myself and Mme. de Rivonnière in reference to her book."

"Perhaps it would be well to write to M. de Valbonne, and consult him."

"That would be childish. To place myself in the position of a formidable rival, when I am already married, would seem to me both ridiculous, and extremely insulting to the poor marchioness, whom you judge so severely. Suppose, my dear aunt, you are not mistaken, and that she has really had, in some extravagant dream, an idea of becoming Mme. Gilbert. She is certainly very contented, at present, in the enjoyment of a position much better suited to her tastes and habits. Must a childish fancy be forever treasured against her? If you should dig up the past of all women, wouldn't you find thousands of peccadillos, as unreasonable as they are innocent? Really now, aunt, you should allow me to forget every thing, and render justice to the good and intelligent woman, who redresses, by serious work and artless charms, the lightnesses and follies of the girl she was."

Must I insist? Must I warn M. Dietrich, absent on a six-weeks' journey? Must I disturb Marguerite, and tell her to be on her guard? Evidently, I could, and should, do nothing: I had long ago lost hope in endeavoring to guide Cesarine. I was no longer her governess. She was free, and I had no commission from her husband to keep watch over her. There was no indication that he was in a state to obtain vengeance from a rival; and, besides, Paul had sufficient control over him to destroy all suspicions. Then, perhaps, Paul could see more clearly than I. Cesarine, deep in her serious studies, and, it might be, ambitious of fame, perhaps thought no more of him.

He came again several times, and, little by little, they began to see each other frequently. M. Dietrich came back, to find them on relations so discreetly and quietly courteous and friendly, that he did not have the least uneasiness, and did not even think it necessary to inform M. de Valbonne, in his letters. Autumn came, and he proposed to his daughter that she should travel with him for a short time; but she was completely cured, and found in Paris the seclusion necessary for her work. She seemed so calm and happy, that he consented to stay in Paris until the opening of the parliamentary session. Cesarine no longer loved society, and she lived quietly from choice. Her train of suitors had naturally abandoned her. She sought out among her old friends thoughtful persons, occupied with science and politics. Not a fine young man, not a fashionable women, appeared at the Dietrich house. Paul, with his modest ways and serious conduct, was well suited to attend this areopagus of mature people, assembled around the literary and philosophical works of the beautiful marchioness. He took pleasure in the interesting discussions which Cesarine knew so well how to excite and carry on. He appeared very well, when compelled to participate in them. He had already gained several intimate friends in this society. They made much of him; and the more, the oftener they saw him, and the less restrained he was by his natural diffidence. Cesarine succeeded in making him brilliant in spite of himself, and without his discovering the assistance she gave him.

By the end of the winter, their friendship fully established without any sort of crisis or emotion, she requested him to bring Marguerite to see her. He refused, but told her why.

Marguerite was very impressionable, and too little protected, by experience and reason, to leave the sphere where she was both discreet and happy.

In the spring, Paul, whose circumstances were steadily improving, was able to rent, at a distance of only a few miles from Paris, a little country-house, where his wife and child lived with Mme. Feron, without their being forced to work very hard. He went home every evening, and in the morning, before going to business, watered a little clump of plants, which he had the pleasure of seeing grow and blossom. He had never had any other ambition than to own a little spot of ground; and he intended to buy, next year, that which he had rented. He could now leave the office at five o'clock; and he dined in Paris, and afterwards often came to see us. As soon as the clock struck nine, however interesting the conversation might be, he left us to take the last train, and rejoin his family. Sometimes he accepted an invitation to dine with us, and a few notabilities who surrounded the marchioness.

One day, when we were expecting him, I received a note from him. "I am alarmed," he wrote: "Marguerite has sent word that Pierre is very sick. I am going home. Excuse me to Mme. de Rivonnière."

"Take my carriage, and go to my doctor," said Cesarine, "and convey him to your nephew's house. I would go with you if I were at liberty; but I give you Bertrand, who will go to the apothecary's and bring whatever is wanted."

I hastened away. I found the poor child very ill, Paul in despair, and Marguerite almost beside herself. The neighborhood doctor, who had been called in, consulted with the one I had brought. The boy, who had been carelessly vaccinated, had the small-pox. They prescribed the usual remedies, and withdrew, without giving great reason to hope; for the malady had taken a virulent form. We were standing in consternation about the bed of the little sufferer, when Cesarine entered about ten o'clock in the evening, still clothed as she had been in the drawing-room at home, charmingly beautiful, and bringing hope in her very smile. She installed herself among us; then she required Paul and Marguerite to leave us two to watch by the bedside of the sick. The room was so small, that it was necessary not to crowd it too much, on account of the bad air. She undressed, put on a dressing-gown, which she had brought in a handkerchief, stationed herself beside the little bed, and remained there all night, all the next day, and all the nights and days which followed, until the little one was out of danger. She was truly admirable in her conduct; and Paul was, like all the rest, compelled to accept her authority blindly. She was used to the care of the sick at Mireval; and she brought to the task rare physical and moral courage. The peasants believed her gifted with magical powers; for she worked the miracle of reanimating the will and of infusing hope. This miracle she worked for us all, who assembled about the poor child. She had entered into this family, which was cast down with grief and terror, like a ray of sunlight at midnight. She had given us all presence of mind, knowledge of what ought to be done, confidence in the conquest of the illness, — all essential conditions for the success of the best remedies. When she went, she left us joyful, and blessing her providential intervention.

I had to remain some days yet to take care of Marguerite, whom anxiety and

sorrow had made sick also. Cesarine returned to see her, revived her sinking spirits, manifested an interest in her of which she was very proud, re-assured Paul and made him light-hearted, and made Mme. Feron fall in love with her by chatting with her of the commonest things, in language so simple that the superior woman put herself absolutely in the background, so as to come down to the level of the humblest. This charming seductiveness captivated me as well; for, in our conversations, she no more gave a confidential lie to her outward conduct. I persuaded myself that she was completely cured of her pride and passion. I feared no more to excite Paul by sharing the admiration which he had for her. Gratitude to her and affection for her became sacred things: a forecast of danger would have seemed to me an insult to both of them.

So the marchioness had succeeded where Cesarine had failed. She had ameliorated the condition of Paul; for, without a suspicion of it on his part, she had exercised an influence on the plans of M. Latour, through the medium of her father. The latter, having met with some losses, had desired to curtail operations. By lending him a considerable sum of money, M. Dietrich had led him to take quite the opposite course, and to intrust Paul with more important business. She had thus given bread to the child, and rest to the mother; and she had been the nurse of both. She had possessed herself of the confidence, the affection, even the secrets, of the family. All that Paul had sworn to remove out of the reach of her solicitude, she had seized upon; and, so far from complaining of it, he was happy that she had conquered.

One person only, she who up to that time had been the most trusting, Marguerite, with no other light than her own instinct, guessed, or rather felt, the fatality which was enveloping her. She felt it so much the more keenly that she adored the beautiful marchioness, and could accuse her of nothing. Her jealousy burned after a fashion quite the contrary to what we should have anticipated. One day, I found her in tears; and, although it was a wearisome task to listen to her complaints, I was forced to do so. "Don't you see," said she, "you think me happy? Well, I am less so than before my marriage, for which I longed so much. I have learned a little, Paul has a little more time to devote to me, and he thinks he is doing me great good by teaching me. But it kills me: for, you see, I have learned a heap of things which I did not suspect before; and every thing is sad, and every thing hurts my feelings, and condemns me. He cannot speak to me of what is good or evil, without my remembering the evil I have done, and the repugnance he must have for my past life. He tells me I ought to forget it, for all has been repaired; but who has repaired it? He, at the risk of his life, by taking the life of another, and by restoring me my honor at the price of blood. He is good: he begins to pity him whom he detested, and pity for his enemy makes him sorrowful whenever he hears that his enemy will die. If he only loved me enough to find consolation in that! But that can never be. It is not every thing to be a pretty woman, and to love folly: one should also have understanding and knowledge, in order not to be a bore to one who has so much of both. When I wanted to be married, I did not know that. I thought he must be delighted with me and his child; and I always said to

him, 'Where will you be better loved and more happy than with us?' He never contradicted me, but would say, 'You can see very well that I am not happier elsewhere; for I never leave you except when compelled.' But now, though he might dine with us every day, it is very seldom that he comes home before half-past nine at night. He never sees Pierre put to sleep. He looks at him, indeed, in his little crib, and, in the morning, carries him into the garden, and eats him up with kisses. But I watch Paul through my window-curtain, and see that he is in low spirits. I even fancy, sometimes, that there are tears in his eyes. If I should try to question him, he would always answer with the same gentleness, and chide me with the same kindness as ever; but he seems severe in spite of himself, and I see how hard it is for him to refrain from telling me that I am ungrateful. Then I ask his pardon, and say nothing more to him. I am too much afraid of tormenting him; but it still remains a weight on my heart. I sing, I laugh, I bustle about, to distract myself. That succeeds as long as the child is awake, and I am occupied with him; but, when he shuts his blue eyes, heaven is shut out. Then Mme. Feron goes to sleep too. Paul has forbidden me to take her into my confidence; and she loves to talk, and my silence wearies her. I remain alone, and wait until my husband comes home. I take my work, and say to myself, 'Two hours isn't so very long.' But it seems to me two years. I don't know why these two hours, which he could give us but doesn't, make me foolish, unjust, wicked. I dream of misfortune and despair. If I didn't fear to wake up the little one, I should cry out, I suffer so much. I look at the window as if I could see, through it, what Paul is doing at Paris; and yet I know very well he is doing nothing wrong: he can't do any thing but what is right. I know that he goes often to see you; and it's very natural he should, — you are just the same as his mother. When he comes back, I always ask him if he has seen you. He says yes; for he never tells a lie. Then if he has seen the beautiful marchioness, if she had many people at her house, if he is glad to get back to me; and he laughs, and says yes. He makes me tell him every thing the little dear has done all day, how he has amused himself, what he has eaten and drunk: indeed, he seems so happy in talking about, baby that I don't dare to speak about myself. I don't say a word about my misery. Sometimes I am very pale and dragged out; but he doesn't notice it, or, if he does, never knows why. I would like to tell him every thing, and confess to him that I am tired of life, and am sometimes sorry that he prevented me from taking it. But I am afraid of causing him pain, of adding to the troubles he has; for he has much to try him, I am sure, — perhaps he is more to be pitied than I am."

That day Marguerite did not let me suspect that she had any jealousy of the marchioness; but another time, it was to Cesarine herself that she opened her heart.

XX.

SOME weeks had passed since Pierre's sickness. Cesarine went to see him every Sunday, and so passed with Paul and myself a part of that day which Paul had always consecrated entire to his family. During the week, he was accustomed to dine at the Die-

trichs' on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and to go there to pass an hour almost every evening. This was a great cause of sorrow to Marguerite; but I thought it unjust in her to regard it in that light. I had not spoken to Paul about it; hoping he would take the wise part, and be unwilling to enchain himself so closely. He was already slave enough to his duty. Was a little of the pleasure of society not to be permitted to a man of intelligence, condemned to the companionship of so illiterate a woman?

However, I began to be distressed by his troubled look, and the low spirits in which I often found him. The marchioness herself perceived the same things; and, if she did not speak of them, it was because she knew too well that she was herself the cause. Marguerite longed to be questioned. Like all children, she did not know what to do unless people interested themselves in her. To speak of herself, to complain, to dilate, to boast by self-accusation, to ask judgment, to repent, to promise, and to begin it all over again, such was her habit; and since the Feron was no longer in her confidence, and since Paul, married to her, had inspired her with a sort of fear, she was damming up the gathering floods in her heart, that must break forth at last.

As we were all three in the little garden, Paul being busy outside, she broke through the slight barrier which our absence of curiosity had formed. "Paul was very much amused at your house last evening, I suppose," said she in a bitter tone; "for he missed the train, and only got back home, by walking all the way, at eleven o'clock."

"Really!" said Cesarine. "Were you frightened?"

"Very much. A man alone like that on the road, where one meets only people who are roaming about for no one knows what! You ought to send him away sooner. When he doesn't come home at the regular time, I count the minutes. It worries me very much."

"Dear child," replied Cesarine, with wonderful gentleness, "we will see that it doesn't happen again. We will scold Bertrand when the clocks are slow."

"You ought to put them ahead an hour; for he amuses himself so well at your house, that he forgets me."

"Nobody gets any *amusement* at our house, Marguerite. On the contrary, we are very serious."

"Yes; but that's his way of amusing himself. But you wouldn't try to make me believe that you don't have lots of pretty ladies there?"

"Oh, you are mistaken! Pretty ladies don't come there any more."

"You are there always; and you are worth a hundred."

"Thank you; but you can't be jealous of *me?*"

Marguerite looked the marchioness in the face with a sort of terror; then she bent before the clear and deep eyes which questioned her. She fell at Cesarine's feet, took her hands and kissed them. "My beautiful marchioness," said she, "you know that you are my good angel upon earth. You brought about my marriage; for I am sure I owe that to you. I owe you the life of my child, and his good looks too; for without you he would have been disfigured. When I think what pains you took with him, without being disgusted with that horrible disease, without fear of taking it, without permitting me to come near it, without caring for yourself a bit, so as to be able to care for others! Yes, indeed, you are the guardian angel; and I shall never be able to tell you how much I love you. But

all that doesn't prevent me from being jealous of you. Could I be otherwise? You have every thing, and I have nothing. You are as beautiful as when you were sixteen; and I, younger than you, am already faded. I feel that I am bent over like an old woman, while you are as straight as a poplar in spring. You have, to render you still more pretty, all kinds of fine dresses, which would be of no use to me. If I had them, I should not know how to wear them. When I put a little end of ribbon in my hair so as to make it look nice, Paul takes it off, saying, 'That doesn't look well: you are more beautiful with your hair loose.' But my hair is coming out. See! I have lost more than half of it now; and when a little more of it is gone, if I buy a chignon, Paul will laugh at me. He will say, 'Remain as you are. It isn't your hair I like, it is your heart.' That's very pretty; and it's true, it's too true. He likes my heart, and he doesn't care any thing for my person. He's too used to it. Friendship doesn't count gray hairs when they begin to appear. He will like me old, he will like me homely. I know it, and am proud of it. But it's only friendship; and I should be satisfied with that if I were altogether sure that he is not capable of feeling love. He says he isn't. He declares that he does not know what it is to attach himself to a woman because she has handsome eyes or fine dresses."

"I believe," said Cesarine, smiling in a singular way, "that he tells you the truth."

"Yes, my marchioness; but when, with fine dresses and handsome eyes, one is altogether elegant and lovable, and has a great mind, great learning, great kindness, every thing that a man could admire, — ah! it isn't possible that he shouldn't love you. That's what I say to myself every evening, when he is at your house, and I am at home waiting for him."

"What you have said is very wrong," replied Cesarine, without showing any other emotion than a slight vexation. "Come, my poor Marguerite! are you entirely without a conscience, and wholly without reverence for the most sacred things? Do you suppose, that, if your husband was so foolish as to fall in love with me, I shouldn't discover it?"

"Perhaps, my marchioness. Don't scold me. Who can tell? Paul is so curious, so different from other people! I know that everybody isn't like him. There are those who can conceal nothing, people who are not worthy to be compared with him, but who are more open, more passionate, whose good and bad sides one knows at once. No one is long deceived by them: they go where the wind drives them. But Paul, with his reason, his courage, his patience, — no one can know any thing of him!"

"It seems to me," said Cesarine, with an irony of which Marguerite did not feel the full meaning, "that you are now making a strange allusion to the past. I should think, that, while you are putting your husband so far above mine, you had deep down in your heart something of regret for a passion less pure, but more quick, than friendship."

Marguerite blushed to the eyes, but without restraining herself from overflowing on a subject too delicate for her. I saw in presence of each other two natures as completely opposed as the mind of the romancer could fancy, — the one uniting in herself all the authority a woman is capable of exercising over herself and others; the other absolutely destitute of defence, capable

of reasoning and reflecting up to a certain point, but forced, by the nature of her feelings, to yield every thing and reveal every thing.

"You are right to laugh at me," she replied. "It is not nice to remind one of that dreadful past, when one has a better present which one does not deserve. But can't I speak of every thing to you? See, now, if I haven't reason to be jealous of you. For whom was it that I was deceived and deserted? Although Paul has never wished me to speak of it, of course some words on the subject must have escaped him. Your marquis has loved you a good while. It was in a fit of disgust that he sought me: it was to return to you that he left me. What has happened to me once may happen again. Perhaps it is my fate that you shall do me all the evil and all the good in my life."

"You have lost your head entirely, Marguerite," said I. "You forget that the Marchioness de Rivonnière no longer belongs to herself. You fail in respect to her; and you do your husband an injury. I admire the patience with which my friend listens and replies to you; and I should like to know what Paul would think of you if he should hear you."

"Ah!" she cried in a scared way, "if you tell him, I am lost."

"I shall not tell him; for I don't want to render him unhappy, by forcing him to regret his marriage."

Marguerite wept bitterly. The marchioness consoled and quieted her with maternal gentleness, telling me that I did wrong to scold her; for it was necessary to humor, and not to be rough with sick children. Marguerite sobbed at her feet, covered her with kisses, asked her pardon, swore a hundred times that she would never again be so silly, and, hearing Paul coming, ran to the other end of the garden, so that he should not see her tears.

But he saw, and was troubled by them; and, the next day, wrote me the following letter: —

"My poor Marguerite is sick, sick at heart especially. I have made her confess, and know that she has said very stupid things to Madame de Rivonnière. I know, too, that Madame de Rivonnière is kind and wise enough to see in her only a poor child to be pitied, cared for, and cured. I know that she would be patient, and that her pity would be inexhaustible. But in this case, if she will pardon me, my pride, or rather my discretion of old times, again asserts itself. I should impose on no one but myself the care of my sick child. I think it will be very easy. It will be sufficient that I abstain from remaining at Paris during the evening for some little time to come. I shall try to arrange to call upon you sometimes about five o'clock, because you are usually at home then; and I shall deprive myself of the pleasures of after-dinner chat. Beg Mme. de Rivonnière to be a little less perfect, — that is to say, to be a little severe, and to pretend coolness towards my wife for a week or two. It isn't right that the child should become accustomed to give offence with impunity to one whom at the bottom of her heart she cherishes and respects. Do not be uneasy, my dear aunt. I know also how to take care of children; and I do not regard these childish contradictions as a misfortune. My very profound respects to our friend, and my love to you. PAUL."

"He will have hard work to conceal it," said Cesarine, to whom I showed this letter; "but he is very

unhappy. He yields to her, and that is worse still. He mistakes patience for force. That poor girl will not change: she will never believe in others, because she has lost the right to believe in herself. No woman, however strong she may be, can ever recover entirely from the effect of a slip; and, if she is weak, she never recovers at all. There is at the bottom of this unhappy heart a bitterness which nothing can sweeten. The weakness at which she blushes she is eager to discover in others who have nothing to blush for. If she could discover it in me, while she is furious and in despair, it would be a triumph for her, and would give her a cowardly and bitter pleasure. I told you that Paul could not marry this girl, and you felt it yourself. She will make him pay cruelly for the greatness of his soul."

"Don't you fear that the same thing will happen to you? Did you not marry without love, in a fit of generosity?"

"I married a dead man; and that is a very different thing. Besides, I took the precaution that the dead should not live again, — with me. I have done no act of sentimentality. I thought to strike a great blow; and I should have struck it, if Paul had not spoiled my work by marrying his mistress."

I did not dare to ask an explanation of these mysterious words, so much did I fear to see Cesarine overthrow the pedestal on which she had mounted. But she was weary of keeping silence: the openness of Marguerite had broken the charm; the serenity of the goddess was disturbed by that vulgar affair. Cesarine needed to speak as much as Marguerite: she spoke in spite of me.

"You don't wish to understand," she resumed, irritated by my silence.

"No," said I. "I prefer to believe."

"Cruel! How long since you have begun to laugh at the punishment which you think destiny has inflicted on me? You believe me to be conquered and broken, do you not? Well, you are mistaken. I am not so, and I will never be so. I have wished to be loved by Paul Gilbert, and I am."

"That is false," I cried. "His friendship for you is as pure as every other sentiment he has ever cherished."

"And who would wish it to be otherwise?" she replied, in her most crushing manner. "Did you ever suppose I wished to lead him into an adulterous connection, and with myself?"

"No, surely; but you think perhaps to confound his reason, torment his heart and his senses."

"I do not stoop to discover if there are senses, and whether my image troubles them. I live in a sphere of ideas and sentiments, whither such miserable questions do not penetrate. I am an elevated nature: I live above reality. You ought to be aware of this; and, when you forget it, you humble yourself more than you offend me. I have desired to be the object of Paul's most noble and most pure, at the same time as his most intense affection. Do you think I have failed?"

"If you have not failed, you have accomplished a work of malevolence and destruction. To thrust one's self into the place of his legitimate wife in the heart and thoughts of her husband, to steal away from the chosen partner the place which he ought to occupy in the heart and thoughts of his wife, is, in the lofty and solemn position you

pretend to occupy, to commit a double adultery, which does not need the addition of sensuality to be criminal. It is to play coolly with the ties of marriage, to overturn the truest notions, and create in their stead a code based upon personal affinities, in disregard of all duties. It is a scaffolding of sophisms, of lies to one's own conscience; and, all premeditated, reasoned-out, and worked up, as you have done, is hateful to me. That is my opinion; and, if you cannot hear it without being angry, let us separate. You have revealed too much: I esteem you no more. I shall try not to love you any more, either."

"How irritable and intolerant you are becoming!" she replied coldly. "Come! be calm. You tell me the truth furiously: I will tell you the truth more calmly. It may be that I am romantic; but I pretend to be so with dignity, with success, and to cause the pretended sophisms which I would make truths to triumph in my own case. You, poor thing, understand nothing of love, of duty, or of the family relations. Never having been loved, you regard virtue as consistent only with not loving. As for the science of the human heart, you cannot learn it, having no occasion to study it in yourself. You have your own ideas on social questions, — those of conventionality. You cannot see beyond these ineffectual barriers, for you are not tall enough. It seems to you that what is arranged is sacred; that I owe my entire soul to the man to whom I have sworn fidelity, just as Paul, according to your theory, owes all his heart and his every thought to Marguerite. Well, that is false, paradoxical, illusory, impossible! The hypocritical conventionality of the world says all these things, and does not believe a word of them. I am not deceived by them, however. I understood perfectly, that in linking myself to M. de Rivonnière, whose wife I did not wish to be, I made a vow of chastity; because I ought not to force him to give his name to the children of another. He understood it also; for, in engaging to leave me free, he performed an act of absolute confidence in my loyalty. Paul, in like manner, committed no deception towards Marguerite, although the understanding between them was altogether different. He has always withheld the impossible passion which the poor fool wished to inspire in him. He gives her his protection, which is due to her, and the sensual companionship of which I am not jealous. She is his housekeeper and mistress; and she can be no more. She is not his wife, because she is not his equal before God; nor his lover, because she degrades love by her debased notions of it. He *cannot* love her. Whatever a good man *cannot* do is evil; and misplaced love dishonors the soul, and cramps the heart and the mind. You wish that I should love that woman! Your conscience tells you that is a falsehood, for she is not agreeable even to you: you make her feel it even more keenly than I do. You wish me to love my half-savage in the guise of a knight-errant, whom I married to show Paul that I had no sensuality in my composition! If I loved this Rivonnière, who, notwithstanding his fine manners and his good education, is, on another social scale, the counterpart of the rudimentary Marguerite, I should be degraded truly; but I have no taste for mean things. I love my husband as Paul loves his wife. They are two people of a different variety of the human species from that to which we belong. External circumstances have forced us to associate with them in

certain limits, — he to have children, I to have none. What we owe to them is the opposite of love. Paul owes paternity: I, chastity. Why should he be dissatisfied with my position towards my husband, when his relations with his wife are a matter of perfect indifference to me? Our bond is intelligence; our fraternity is thought; our love is ideal. We do love, and you cannot help it. Tell him, now, every thing that your clumsy prudence can suggest against me. He will not believe it: he will not even understand you. Try it: I wish you would. Leave me, and go live with him, telling him that my perversity became abhorrent to you. He will receive you with open arms; but you shall read every hour, in his sorrowful eyes, this unspoken sentence, 'My poor aunt is under a delusion; and now I have two sick children to take care of.'"

Having thus crushed me, she went away calmly, to write to Paul that she altogether approved his desire to care personally for his companion; that she respected his wish to see her no more for a short time; but that she could not persuade herself to appear angry, as he requested, since she could pardon every thing in the mother of the adorable little Pierre. Then three pages of postscript to ask the opinion of Paul as to certain works to be consulted. The correspondence was begun. Paul's leisure was completely occupied in replying to her letters; for she felt compelled to write to him every evening when he did not come to call upon her.

XXI.

ONE morning Marguerite fell upon us unawares. Paul had brought her to Paris to buy some articles necessary to the boy; and she escaped to come and see *her marchioness*, whom she implored not to betray her.

"I know that I am disobeying;" she added; "but I cannot live in this way without asking your pardon. Of course you don't require it of me; but I wanted to do it, I detest myself so much for having been so insolent and ugly to you. I will never be so again, you are so grand, and Paul is so good! When he saw how tormented I was by his having letters from you, he showed them to me. I didn't understand a word of them, except that you approved of his remaining with me, and that you always loved me. Now, listen. I cannot accept the sacrifice which he makes for me in working in a little, close room for hours, when he might say to you every thing that he writes, in your beautiful drawing-room, with you to answer and draw out his great thoughts, which are stifled while he is with me. No, no: I will not render him unhappy and a prisoner. I have told him so, but he will not believe it; and it is for you to attract him back to your house. Write to him that you need him: he can refuse you nothing."

"That wouldn't be true," replied Cesarine. "I have no need to see him to accomplish my work. I consult him to ease my conscience. When I shall have finished, I shall submit the whole thing to him; but that can be done just as well in writing."

"No, no. It is a very different thing. He needs to talk with you, for he is terribly bored at home. What can I say to amuse him? Nothing! I am too simple and ignorant."

Marguerite was in the habit of depreciating herself in order to get compliments, and thus have her own good opinion of herself confirmed. She was in fact very greedy of this kind of

consolation. Cesarine was not sparing of it; but she gave it with such irony, that the poor woman found her altogether too indulgent, and replied, "You say all that out of pity. You don't think it, and you are so kind that you say what is untrue to please me. I see very well that you are tired and weary of me; and I will not come again. But you can do good to me from a distance. Recall Paul to your dinners and your evening parties, — that's all I ask."

"Then you are not jealous any more? That is all over?"

"No: it is not all over. I am jealous always. The more I see of you, the more I see it is impossible not to love you; but, stupid as I am, I have more force of character and more heart than you think, and more than Paul suspects. You will see, when the time comes, I am capable of loving to the point of finding a duty, a virtue, and perhaps happiness, in my jealousy."

"That was a very profound remark," observed Cesarine as soon as Marguerite had gone. "She expressed, in her own language, a sentiment which would be very grand if she were capable of having it. To love Paul to the extent of blessing me for inspiring her with a love which he could not have for her, would be a sublime sacrifice for her untamed character. But she loves to boast, poor creature! and, if now and then she is capable of conceiving a noble sentiment, it by no means follows that she will pursue it, and realize it. It is not a work for a village girl: one doesn't learn to wring one's heart, and to cleanse and purify it, by beating linen."

"Who knows, great Cesarine? There is one thing which these primitive natures sometimes know, and which your metaphysical and other works will never teach you."

"What is that?"

"Self-abnegation."

"What has my life been, then? I thought I had never done any thing but to sacrifice my first inclinations"—

"To what? To the wish for success, from your own point of view. The wish for defeat, that another may get the victory, you will never experience. It is more beyond you than beyond Marguerite."

"You are going to make a martyr of her, a saint. That's a new way to look at it!"

"What she has just done in begging you to take her husband every evening, at the time when she is uneasy and weary, is, of itself, generous enough. You do not deign to look at it in that light; but I am much struck by it."

"That isn't the whole of it. Paul is bored with her, as she says: she is afraid he will become too weary of her, and will seek some distraction less worthy than my conversation."

"You try to depreciate her. Perhaps you are more jealous of her than she is of you."

"I, jealous of that creature!"

"You hate her, for you insult her."

"I cannot hate her: I disdain her."

"And all the kindness which you have expended to charm her, and bring her to submission, was but the hypocrisy born of your determination to rule."

"Pity allies itself very strongly with disdain: indeed, it can ally itself only with that. Noble endurance inspires respect. Pity is the alms given to the blameworthy and the weak."

Cesarine expected to see Paul return to her that very evening. He did not come; and, however sincere the penitence of Marguerite may have been he appeared at the Dietrich mansi but rarely, and then only to say a

words in regard to the book, the first proofs of which had been taken. He approved the changes which the author had made in it; but he did not conceal from me that these improvements did not realize all that he had expected from an entire recast of the work. Cesarine had not attained, he thought, the complete development of her ideas. He did not dare to ask her to begin all over again; and, when I reproached him with a failure of his customary frankness in literary matters, he replied, "I do not think that is true, for I do not see why the Marchioness de Rivonnière should be obliged to produce a *chef d'œuvre:* it is I who am to blame for imagining her capable of it. What she has asked me to do, I have done. I have given my opinion, and have pointed out the bad, the excellent, the weak spots. I have discussed the matter with her, and have indicated the sources of information, and the topics for reflection. What she desired, she said, was to produce a work that should be very readable, and to a slight extent profitable: this she has accomplished. I am convinced still, that, when she has become more mature, she might reach a result really worthy of her; but her friends do not ask so much of her, and she is deceived as to the merit of her work, as is the case with all who write, or else she is gifted with extreme modesty, and is contented that it should have only a moderate effect. I have no right to be more severe and exacting with her than she is with herself. If her book is but little read, and is talked about only in her own circle, that will be no obstacle to a better work by and by."

I still loved Cesarine, notwithstanding our quarrels, which became more and more animated; and perhaps I loved her so much the more, because I saw her going astray. It became evident to me that Paul had not for her the enthusiastic, absorbing, overpowering friendship, which she flattered herself she had inspired in him. He was capable of serious affection, — of a gratitude gladly manifested by his devotion to her; but his passion did not burn within him at all, and he did not seem in the least to experience the need, which both Cesarine and Marguerite attributed to him, of being inflamed by an ideal.

Deceived in this idea, what would become of Cesarine's terrible will, if she could not devote herself to the glory of letters? I was not duped by her careless modesty. I knew that she aspired to great triumphs, and that she was connecting these two objects, — the world at her feet, and Paul conquered by the brilliancy of her glory. I suspected that defeat in either would carry the other with it. I tried to warn her; and, with the consent of Paul, I made her aware of his opinion. She was a little troubled at first, but shortly recovered, and said, "I understand, when my book is printed, he supposes I will forget the useful advice and the faithful corrector. He wishes to prolong our intimacy. He is right: I should not forget him, but I should have less occasion to see him frequently. Tell him that I acknowledge his superior judgment, and that I wish he would stop the printing. I will begin again. Tell him, too, that it costs me nothing, if he believes me capable of doing something worth while."

So much wisdom and gentleness, the real cause of which it was not permitted me to tell him, disarmed Paul, and advanced Cesarine greatly in his esteem. But the more this sentiment of esteem filled him, the more pure and peaceful did it seem to become in him.

Cesarine did not expect the obstinacy with which he refrained from visiting her: he seemed to take a real pleasure in it. I went to see him on Sunday. "Marguerite is much better," said he. "I have succeeded in persuading her that it is more agreeable to me to contribute to her pleasure than to seek distraction elsewhere. It is substantially true. To be sure, her conversation is not always brilliant, and is not so valuable as that of the marchioness and her guests; but I would rather see her satisfied than escape personal sacrifices. My duty is to render her happy; and a good man should not know if there is any thing more pleasurable than duty."

Marguerite declared that she was happy. No longer forced to work for her living, she read all that she could comprehend, and really informed herself a little; but she was sick, and her beauty was rapidly disappearing. Cesarine's physician, who saw her occasionally, told me in confidence that he thought she was afflicted with a chronic malady of the liver or stomach. She knew so little how to give an account of her sensations, that without a serious examination, to which she would not submit, he could not define her disease exactly. I informed Paul; and he insisted on the examination. Tumefaction of the liver was discovered; her general condition was low; daily attention was necessary, and all that was prescribed was not procurable in the country. The little family returned to town, to apartments in the Rue de Vaugirard, more comfortable than those in the Rue d'Assas, and very near the shades of the Luxembourg. Paul came to say to us that henceforth he was at our service at any hour. He had a clerk to keep his office, and was no more a chained slave. He had gained money for the firm; and his connections made him valuable to M. Latour. He arrived at leisure and liberty much sooner than he had hoped. We saw more of him therefore; that is to say, we saw him oftener: but Paul did not prolong his visit beyond a single hour. He was really disturbed about his wife; and, when he was not caring for her at home, he was taking her to ride, or seeking to amuse her in some way. She was very eager to see her marchioness once more, to show her, she said, that she had become reasonable. Cesarine invited Paul to bring Marguerite to her own house, with little Pierre, promising to let them go in time for the child's hour for retiring. She insisted so strongly, that Paul yielded.

XXII.

IT was a great and joyful occasion for Marguerite. She put on her Sunday dress, — her black silk, which became her very well, — and dressed her hair with not a little taste. Little Pierre's toilet she made with extreme care. Paul put them in a carriage, and brought them to the Dietrich residence at six o'clock. Cesarine had an early dinner, so that the child should not go to sleep before dessert. She had invited no one, on account of the unseasonable hour; and it was actually a family dinner. M. Dietrich came in to shake hands with Paul, bow to his wife, and kiss his son, and then went out to dress for dinner in the city.

Cesarine had resigned herself "to converse with the fallen girl," as she said; but the latter was not in the least grieved by the kind of equality to which Cesarine had decided to admit

her. It was more than a month since they had seen each other; and Cesarine was much struck by the change which had taken place in Paul's wife. She was very thin, and her features had become pinched and sharp. She had made a great effort in that short time to become circumspect, and not to appear vulgar; and she had almost succeeded. She spoke less, and more to the point. Paul treated her, not with more consideration, for he had never failed in that respect, but with more marked gentleness, and a more earnest solicitude for her. These changes did not pass unperceived. It was a great blow to Cesarine; and, while a smile of benevolence was on her lips, a dark fire gathered in her eyes, and jealousy gnawed at that stony heart. I trembled for Marguerite.

It seemed to me, too, that Marguerite noticed it, and that she could not help appearing pleased by it. The dinner was gloomy, although little Pierre, who behaved well, and was just beginning to talk, succeeded now and then in making us laugh. Paul would gladly have been talkative; but he saw Cesarine so strangely abstracted, that he wished to know the cause of it, and felt uneasy in his own mind, without knowing why. When we left the table, he whispered to me, to inquire if the marchioness had any particular reason to be so sad. He feared that the opinion he had given in regard to her book, so well received at first, had, on reflection, discouraged her a little. Cesarine heard every thing with her eyes: low as we whispered, she knew what was the subject of our conversation. "You find me sad," said she, without giving me time to answer him. "I ask pardon of Marguerite, to whom I would wish to have given a better reception; but I am very much troubled. I have lately received bad news from the Marquis de Rivonnière."

As she had not told me this, I supposed she had invented it as a pretext. The last letter of M. de Valbonne to M. Dietrich was not one to give occasion for any immediate uneasiness. On my saying so, she replied by reading to us what follows: —

"My poor friend disquiets me more and more every day. His life is not in greater danger, but his pains do not seem to disappear so quickly. He directs me to present his respects to you, as well as to Madame de Rivonnière.

"VISCOUNT DE VALBONNE."

This letter puzzled Paul. "What are these pains," he asked, "which do not threaten his life, but continue in a way to cause disquiet to his friends? Has M. de Valbonne never written more clearly?"

"Never," replied Cesarine. "His mind is troubled; and that affects his mode of expression, so that it is always vague. But don't let us speak of this," she added, with an air of commiseration for Marguerite. "We forget that there is some one here to whom the memory and the name of my husband are particularly disagreeable."

Paul thought this delicacy far from delicate; and, with the promptness and clearness of appreciation with which he was gifted, replied quickly and without embarrassment, "Marguerite hears the name of M. de Rivonnière without emotion. She does not know him: she has never known him."

"I thought she had some reason to complain of him," replied Cesarine, looking at her to make her lose countenance; "and surely she knows, that, in that case, I should not plead the cause of my husband before her."

"You are wrong, my marchioness," replied Marguerite, sadly but gently. "One should always defend one's husband."

"Above all, when he is absent," added Paul firmly. "As for ourselves, punished offences no longer exist. We never speak of a man whom I have had the cruel duty to kill. He who lives to-day is absolved; and the avenged wife has never more cause to blush."

He spoke with a quiet energy, at which Cesarine could take no offence, but which brought rage and despair to her soul. Marguerite, with moist eyes, cast upon Paul a look of delighted gratitude. I saw that Cesarine was going to say something cruel. "The child is asleep," I cried. "You ought not to stay any longer: your carriage is below. Take Monsieur Pierre, my dear Paul: he is too heavy for me."

At this instant, Bertrand came to announce that the carriage had arrived; and, he added with distinct voice and with unalterable serenity, "M. the Marquis de Rivonnière has arrived also."

"Where?" cried Cesarine, as if shot.

"At the house of Madame la Marquise," replied Bertrand with the same calmness. "He is coming up the stairs."

"We will take leave of you," said Paul, taking Marguerite under one arm, and the boy upon the other.

"No! Remain! It is necessary!" replied Cesarine desperately.

"Why?" asked Paul, astonished.

"It is necessary, I tell you. I beg you to remain."

"Very well," said he, returning to the sofa; where he placed the sleeping child, and made Marguerite sit down beside him.

Did Cesarine fear the jealousy of her husband? Did she mean to show him that she received Paul in company with his wife? Or, more occupied with her own spite than with any thing else, did she find revenge in a new meeting between Marguerite and her seducer in the presence of Paul? Perhaps she was too much agitated to know what she wished and what she did; but, prompt to recover self-control, she went out to meet the marquis. We heard her exclaim from the landing, in a loud voice, "What a nice surprise! How! Cured! And they wrote that you were no better!"

"Valbonne is mad," replied the marquis in a full and hearty voice. "I am well. I am cured, you see. I walk, speak, go up stairs, without help;" and, entering the anteroom to the drawing-room, he added, "you have company?"

"No," replied Cesarine, entering first, "only friends of yours and mine, who were going, but want to shake hands with you first."

"Friends?" repeated the marquis, finding himself face to face with Paul. "Friends? I do not recognize" —

"You do not recognize M. Paul Gilbert and his wife?"

"Ah! I beg pardon. It is so dark here, — My dear friend!"

He shook hands with Paul, to whom he addressed the last words. "Madame, I present you my best respects," bowing profoundly to Marguerite. "Ah, Mlle. Nermont! Happy to see you once more;" and he kissed my hand. "You seem to be in good health."

"But you?" said Paul.

"I? Perfectly well, thank you. I bear travelling remarkably."

"But why did you come without notifying us?" asked Cesarine.

"I had the honor to write you."

"I have received nothing from you."

"When I tell you that Valbonne is insane!"

"My dear friend, I don't understand. Why is he permitted to suppress your letters?"

"It will be a long story to tell you, — a story of crazy doctors about a sick man, who is in full revolt because he will not race about any longer for the health he has fully recovered."

"You come from Italy?" asked Paul.

"Yes, my dear friend, — a country much overrated, like every one that is praised to a foreigner. I like France only; and, in France, I like only Paris. What is the news of your young friend M. Latour?"

"He is well."

"M. Dietrich is out, I have been told. But he is to return early. Will Madame la Marquise permit me to await him here?"

"Certainly, my friend. Have you dined?"

"I have dined, thank you."

Paul exchanged a few more polite but insignificant words with the marquis and Cesarine before withdrawing. The startling arrival of M. de Rivonnière had restored the situation to a dead calm. He was quiet, good-humored, and polite. He was excited and astonished at nothing: in other words, he dropped back into the world as if he had never quitted it. He returned from the dead as he might have returned from Orleans. He found himself once more at his wife's house, in presence of his rival and murderer, and of the woman for the possession of whom he had paid with his blood, all at once, without seeming to remember any thing but the laws of good manners, and the customs which should be observed in every meeting, however strange it may be. The imperturbability of the perfect gentleman covered every thing else.

On bad terms with her conscience, Cesarine had been frightened for a moment; but strong in something stronger than the customs of society, strong in her intrepid woman's will, she had speedily recovered her presence of mind. At the same time, she felt some uneasiness at being left alone with her husband, and begged me to remain, quietly telling me that she wished it, while they were lighting the chandelier.

"At last," said the marquis, as soon as Bertrand was gone, "I see you again, Madame la Marquise, more beautiful than ever, and with happiness and good-humor speaking from your eyes. Indeed, one would have said you are glad to see me."

Cesarine's face did not express that joy precisely. I asked myself if he were rallying her, or was under a delusion. "I do not answer such a question," said she with the best smile she could muster. "It is my turn to look at you. Truly you are well: any one would know it. But what did the fear of your friend mean, when he said you were incurable?"

"Valbonne is very much excited. He is an incomparable friend; but he has the weakness of looking on the dark side, so much the more because he believes in the doctors. You will say that I ought to believe in them too, owing so much to them. I believe only in Nelaton, who extracted the ball. The cause removed, these doctors undertook also to relieve me of the effects, as if there were ever effects without a cause. Instead of letting me get well, they treated me as most of them always do, in a manner totally opposed to my temperament. When, a year ago almost, I cut away from their authority to follow my own instincts, I

felt better immediately. I went away. Three days afterwards I felt cured. There were sharp pains remaining, but that was all. But I had already had those two or three years before I had the honor of being acquainted with you; and I got rid of them by paying no attention to them. When Valbonne carried me off this time, he committed me to the charge of a young doctor, intelligent but obstinate, who, disturbed at seeing me cured so quickly, with no aid but that of my vigorous constitution, wished to relieve me of these pains wholly, and has actually rendered them much more violent. I had to send him about his business, quarrel a little with my poor Valbonne, and then give them both the slip, so as not to become the victim of their devotion to my person."

"Give them the slip!" said Cesarine. "Then they didn't return with you?"

"I came with Dubois alone, my best physician. He understands that it isn't necessary to get excited in opposing people; and, when I am suffering, he is patient with me. That is the best way too."

"And where are the others?"

"Valbonne and the doctor? I don't know. I left them at Marseilles, where they were going to make me embark for Corsica, under the pretext that I would find there a summer climate suited to me. I agreed to the plan, but didn't care to carry it out. I confided to Dubois *my* plan of coming to Paris to remain; and we left them in the sweetness of slumber. Of course they came after us; but we had twelve hours' start, and they can't be here till to-morrow."

"This is all very strange," said Cesarine. "I didn't suppose you so apt a scholar; and I cannot imagine a doctor and a friend so tyrannical as to force a sick man to flight. Ought I not to suppose that you had the nice idea of surprising me, and that you did not wish to leave your companions a chance to warn me?"

"Perhaps there's something in that, my dear marchioness."

"Why surprise me? With what intention?"

"To see if the first effect of the surprise would be joy or displeasure."

"That's a very bad idea, my friend. It indicates a suspiciousness which proves to me that you are not so thoroughly cured as you say."

"It is right to be suspicious of the little I have obtained of you."

While Cesarine and her husband were chatting thus, I observed the latter closely; and, having been at first struck with the appearance of health and strength which he seemed to possess, I began to be alarmed by a very singular change in his looks. His eyes were no longer what they had been. They had an extraordinary glitter; and this characteristic increased when, provoked to explanation, he shut himself up to a more self-contained courtesy. Was he devoured by a secret jealousy? Was he having a relapse of his fever? Or was that staring, sparkling eye an ineffaceable mark which the nervousness of great physical suffering had left upon him?

While I was reflecting thus, Bertrand came to say that Dubois was at the service of the marquis.

"I understand," replied M. de Rivonnière. "He wishes to take me away. He fears that I may be tired. Tell him I am very well, and am waiting for M. Dietrich."

Then he resumed his painful interview with his wife, questioning her in regard to all her old companions, an

appearing not to have lost memory of the least detail which could interest him. His strange eye alarmed me still. I thought I heard Dubois's voice in the adjoining room. I arose as if without any particular intention, and went to question him.

"Madame la Marquise must send away M. le Marquis," he replied in a low voice. "It is almost time for his attack."

"His attack of what?"

Dubois raised his hand to his forehead in a perplexed way.

"Of what? Pains?"

"Terrible pains."

"Do they make him low-spirited, or furious?"

"First one, and then the other."

"Does he become delirious?"

"Alas, yes! Don't these ladies know it?"

"No: we know nothing."

"Then M. de Valbonne wished to conceal it. But now it is better that every thing should be known. It must be a secret from the world only."

"Does he have fever in his paroxysms?"

"No; and that is why I am always hopeful."

"It is perhaps a reason why we ought to be the more disturbed. Let us speak plainly, Dubois. Your master is insane, is he not?"

"Well, yes, undoubtedly; but he has been so twice before, and was cured. Does mademoiselle believe he was in his right mind when he seduced and abandoned that poor girl"—

"She is now the wife of my nephew."

"Ah! I forgot; but I beg pardon, I have nothing but good to say of her,—an angel of honesty and disinterestedness. M. le Marquis did not commit that act in his normal condition; and later, when he disguised himself to watch the conduct of Mlle. Dietrich, I saw he was not in his right mind. He was wild at night, as now; but he did not have lucid days, as he now does."

"Then he is furiously mad at night?"

"Not furious, but fantastic and violent. With me, there is no danger. He resists me, gets angry, and then yields. He never maltreats me. Any one else exasperates him. He has an aversion for his doctor, and a dislike for M. de Valbonne. I advised him to quit Marseilles, where his condition could not be concealed; and the reason I gave was, that they took bad care of him. Really they took good care of him; but, when a sick man is irritated, it is best that he should have a change of scenes and faces. I have appointed a meeting for to-night with his old doctor. I wanted him to see the marquis in his worst state, but that begins about nine o'clock; and it is necessary that Madame la Marquise should send him away. I do not believe he will resist, he loves her so much."

"He loves her still, then?"

"More than ever."

"And isn't jealous about her?"

"Ah! that I don't know; but I fear he conceals even from me the true cause of his illness."

"Of whom could he be jealous?"

"Always of the same person."

A quick and violent ringing of the bell interrupted us. I returned to the drawing-room as quickly as possible, at the same time as Bertrand. Dubois waited upon the threshold anxiously.

"M. le Marquis wishes to retire," said Cesarine hurriedly. It was like an angry order to her husband to go.

The marquis burst into a laugh,—a convulsive, frightful laugh. "Come, now," said he, "I haven't a right to wait at my wife's house for my father-in-law, have I? I shall stay: don't any

of you be disturbed. Leave me alone with her. I haven't finished talking with her yet."

"Bertrand," cried Cesarine, "will conduct M. le Marquis to his carriage."

She addressed in a tone of distress the champion devoted to her defence in great emergencies. He advanced coolly, ready to seize the marquis with his stout arms; when Dubois darted forward, and held him. Dubois then took his master's arm, saying, "Monsieur le Marquis gave me his word of honor to return at nine o'clock. It is half-past nine."

The marquis seemed to awake as from a dream, looked at his white-haired old servant with childish fear. "You have come to defeat me?" said he with a stupid look. "You shall pay me for that."

"Yes, at home. I should like that. But come."

"You old brute! I yield to-day, but to-morrow" —

Dubois led him away unresisting. Bertrand followed, all ready to lend a helping hand in case of need. We silently watched them until, having seen the marquis in his carriage, Bertrand returned to tell us he was gone.

"Bertrand," said Cesarine, "if it ever happens again that M. de Rivonnière presents himself at my door in a state of intoxication, tell him I am not at home, and do not allow him to enter."

"M. le Marquis is not intoxicated," replied Bertrand in his dignified manner; and then with an expressive and respectful gesture, which asked me to explain all, he retired.

"What does he mean?" cried Cesarine.

"Do you believe," I asked, "that your husband gets intoxicated?"

"Yes, certainly. He is drunk this evening: his eye showed it. Why did you leave us alone? I asked you to remain. Hardly had you gone, when he cast himself at my feet, and began to make the most ridiculous protestations of love; and, when I reminded him of the agreement between us, he remembered nothing of it. He became ugly, silly, almost coarse. Oh, I hate him! — this man who pretends that I belong to him, when I never did."

"Do not hate him: pity him. He is not drunk: he is insane."

She dropped upon a sofa, without being able to say a word. Then she put questions to me rapidly. I told her all that Dubois had told me. She listened with fixed and haggard countenance.

At last she said, "This is a horrible thing, that never entered my mind, — to be the wife of a fool; to have the most odious of battles with a man who retains neither the memory of his own promises nor the consciousness of my rights; to fight not against another will, but against an insane instinct; to feel myself bound, healthy and living, to a brute deprived of reason. It is impossible. The chain is broken by the single fact of insanity. It must be stated openly. The world must know it; and this man must be shut up to preserve me from his fury. I cannot live in dread of being at the mercy of a crazy man. I have done nothing criminal, to have this punishment inflicted upon me all the time. Ah, how did Valbonne, who hates me, deceive me! He knew it; and he made me marry a madman. I will unveil his conduct. I will make him blush before the world!"

M. Dietrich returned. She told him the story in a few words, and continued to breathe out her anger and chagrin in threats and complaints, adjuring her father to protect her, and to take im-

mediate steps to annul her marriage. She wished a divorce: separation would not suffice. M. Dietrich, overwhelmed at first, aroused himself as soon as he saw his daughter so distracted. He was, after all, admirably clear-headed in a great crisis. "You speak ill, my daughter," said he; "and you do not think what you say. Because Jacques has agitated nights, and hours when he is out of his head, it does not follow that he is mad, when a poor old man like Dubois can restrain him, and enable him to conceal his condition. To-morrow we shall know more; but to-day, what we do know is not enough to justify the cruel measure of a legal separation. Remember that it would inflict a mortal wound upon the dignity of him whose name you have accepted. It would be to accuse him and his friends of fraud; and who tells you that any tribunal would pronounce against him? In any case, public opinion would condemn you; for no one is relieved from the performance of duty, however painful it may be. Yours is to wait patiently for an improvement in the condition of your husband, and to do all that you can, without injury to your pride, or compromise of your independence, to calm and cure him. If, after exhausting gentle and persuasive means, we are forced to let it be known that the disease is aggravated, and leaves no room for hope, it will be time to think of taking more vigorous measures. Otherwise, you will be cruelly and justly blamed for having refused your care and consolation."

Cesarine, baffled, could say nothing, and passed the night in deep despair. I did not dare to leave her until morning. I feared that she would be driven to some desperate act. She restrained herself, and had no fits of hysterics; but her grief was terrible. She wept: she said she had no future to look forward to, and her life was sacrificed to something worse than widowhood, — the incessant duty of employing her superior intelligence in restraining the wild passions, or yielding to the puerile desires, of an idiot, ill-tempered in his sane hours, always jealous, and daring to call himself enamoured of her.

The punishment was cruel indeed; but in vain did she represent it to me as an injustice of fate. She had married this dying man, partly in the ostentation of generosity, partly to elevate herself in Paul's estimation, a little also to be a marchioness, and independent into the bargain.

XXIII.

THE next morning M. Dietrich went to see his son-in-law. Finding him asleep, he had a long time to talk with Dubois and the doctor, who had passed the night with the sick man. The result of the observations of his condition was, that he was neither mad nor wholly sane. His brain was in turn over-excited and depressed. A few hours of the day, after the rest of the morning, which was complete, and before the return of his paroxysms in the evening, he would be perfectly sane; and no consultation of physicians, conducted with entire fairness, would lead to the conclusion that he was incapable of managing his affairs, or of treating every one with perfect courtesy. The doctor had conversed with him since his attack, and had found him very well, in body and mind. The doctor did not think he had ever been weak-minded. Simply the prey of a nervous malady, was the manner

in which he summed it up, either the result of his wound, or of the great but hopeless passion which he had entertained, and still had, for his wife.

So there was presented a startling alternative. If Cesarine yielded to his love, would she cure him? If so, was there not reason to fear that the children resulting from their union would be predisposed to organic disease? The doctor neither could nor would say. M. Dietrich was sure his daughter would destroy herself, rather than join herself to a man who would keep her in perpetual terror, and to whose control she would be mortified to yield. He retired without having come to any conclusion. There was nothing for it but to be patient and wait, while purely persuasive means were employed; to observe the effects, and to separate husband and wife, if the result of these endeavors was unfavorable. Then travelling must be tried again. There was no opportunity for any thing more than a compromise; but, in any case, until further developments, M. Dietrich desired that the state of the marquis should be kept secret; and Dubois declared this to be possible, through the local arrangement of the house, and the blind devotion of the servants being fully trustworthy.

Two hours afterwards M. de Valbonne, who had arrived by the night-train, came to talk upon the same subject with M. Dietrich. M. de Valbonne was headstrong and opinionated. He did not like Cesarine, perhaps because he had loved her in vain before her marriage. He thought her blameworthy for not wishing to live with his friend; and when M. Dietrich recalled to his memory the compact of honor by which, in case of his recovery, Jacques bound himself not to claim his rights, the viscount declared that Jacques was too honorable to think of claiming them: it was an insult to him to fear any such thing.

"However," said M. Dietrich, "he caused a scene last evening, and during his madness remembered nothing about it."

"Yes," said M. de Valbonne: "he was then under the control of his madness, I confess; and if his wife had not been the voluntary or unconscious cause of his insanity, by keeping him under her thumb for five years, she might be justified in her pitiless conduct towards him; but she desired him for a friend and servant. She made him too much a slave, and too unhappy. I will even say that she has degraded him too much, not to owe a duty to him now."

"I do not permit you to judge my daughter, Monsieur le Vicomte. I know, that, in marrying your friend against her inclination, she only had in view to raise him from that sort of abasement into which a too submissive and too devoted man sometimes falls."

"Yes; but duty changes with circumstances. Jacques was condemned to death. The reparation given by Mlle. Dietrich was sufficient then, and easily made, permit me to say. She gained a good name" —

"Remember, monsieur, that she was not tired of bearing mine, and that she would not accept her husband's fortune."

"She will have it, all the same. She will play with it, at least, for she has the right to it. She is his wife. Nothing can prevent her, and the law restrains him."

"You are speaking of me," said Cesarine, who entered the room in time to hear the last words." I am

very glad to know your opinion, Monsieur de Valbonne, and to tell you with a kind greeting, that it shall never be mine."

M. de Valbonne explained, and, assuring her as well as he could of the loyalty of the marquis, freely expressed his personal opinion of the existing situation. If Cesarine reported his words correctly to me, he did so with very little tact, and wounded her cruelly by saying that she ought to abjure every other secret affection, however pure it might be, to restore hope, rest, and reason, to the man with whom she had trifled so long and so cruelly.

Then followed a very bitter and very animated discussion, which M. Dietrich tried in vain to stop. Cesarine reminded the viscount that he had paid court to her, and she had refused him. From that day he had hated her, she said; and his devotion to Jacques de Rivonnière was but the cover of an atrocious sentiment of revenge. The quarrel was at its height when Bertrand entered to inquire if any one had seen the marquis. He had ushered the marquis into the great drawing-room, where, he said with entire calmness, he would await Madame la Marquise. Bertrand had gone to Cesarine's apartment to inform her, but, not finding her there, had returned to the drawing-room to say to M. de Rivonnière that he was going to seek her in M. Dietrich's room; but the marquis was not there, and other servants had seen him go into the garden. Bertrand had not found him in the garden either, nor in the marchioness's room; but he was very sure that M. de Rivonnière had not quitted the premises.

M. Dietrich and M. de Valbonne began the search. Cesarine returned to her room, where the marquis had glided, unobserved, and was waiting for her. She started in fright, and made a movement towards the bell-rope. He prevented her, placing himself in the way. "Listen to me," said he. "It is the last time. I know your house too well to wander at random. I wished to speak to your father. I immediately went to his library, where I overheard you and Valbonne talking. I listened. A condemned man has the right to know the grounds of his sentence. I learned one thing which I did not know before, — that I am insane, — and one thing which I would like still to doubt, that your indifference towards me is changed to terror and aversion. I am very unhappy, Cesarine; but I absolve you from having been knowingly the cause. You have never known, and you will never know, love; and that is why you have never suspected the fervor of mine. You never believed that one could go mad from love: you have always laughed at my complaints and my raptures. It is enough to suffer: you shall do me no more injury. Could you but forget that which you have done to me, and never appreciate the extent of it! for you will have remorse. I spare you reproaches; for, insane or not, I feel as calm at this moment as if I were dead. Adieu. If I were vindictive, I should be satisfied in thinking that your passion, for the time being, is to reduce to submission a man whom you will never conquer. He will always prefer his wife to you. I have seen him just now, and I know what he thinks. You will suffer in your pride; for he is stronger in his virtue, than you in your ambition. But I am not disturbed about your future: you will seek other victims, and will find them.

Be happy, therefore, in your way. For my part, I shall forget this sorrowful passion, which has unsettled my reason and embittered my existence."

I entered Cesarine's room just as the marquis began to speak. When he had finished he came to me, took my hand, and kissed it, without a word, and went out without turning around.

Anxious, I wished to follow him. "Let him go," said Cesarine, making a sign to Bertrand, who was waiting in the entry, and followed the marquis. "He does justice to himself. His reproaches are unjust and cruel; but I will not reply to them. On the least excuse, the least consolation I might offer him, he would begin to talk again of his rights and his hopes. Let him alone break this odious chain."

Bertrand returned to tell us that the marquis had entered his carriage, and given orders to drive home.

"Did Dubois accompany him?"

"No, Madame la Marquise. Dubois sits up with the marquis all night, and sleeps by day. But M. de Valbonne, who hadn't left the house, rode away with M. de Rivonnière."

"Never mind, Bertrand: find out what passes at his house, and come and tell me."

Bertrand obeyed, first announcing my nephew.

"Come!" cried Cesarine. "Give me your advice, judge me, aid me: I am distracted. Be my friend and my guide!"

"I know all," replied Paul. "I have just seen M. Dietrich. He thinks only of preserving you. Nor do you have any other purpose. You would not follow the advice my conscience would give you."

"I will follow it," cried Cesarine excitedly.

"Well, call for your carriage, and run to your husband; for I saw him riding away, looking so crushed in spirit, that I fear every thing. He pressed my hand as he passed; and his look seemed to express an eternal farewell."

"I will do it," said Cesarine, ringing the bell.

"But it is not all to go and give him empty words of consolation," resumed Paul. "You must remain near him, watch with him in his hours of delirium, amuse him, and re-assure him in his hours of sanity. If he wishes to leave Paris, you must follow him: you must be his wife, in one word, in the Christian and the human sense, consistently and devotedly."

"Ah, that is — what you advise?" cried Cesarine, convulsively snatching, and bearing to her dry and quivering lips, a glass of cold water. "You tell me to be the wife of M. de Rivonnière?"

"And why not?" he replied. "I am the latest and the most disinterested of your friends. You consult me: otherwise it would not be permitted me to tell you what I think."

"What you think is odious. A woman ought not to respect herself? She ought to give herself away without love, like a sold slave?"

"No, never! But if she is a noble woman, if she has a heart, if she pities the misfortune which she has voluntarily caused, she makes pity transform itself into love. What is love, then, but charity in its highest manifestation?"

"Ah, yes! You think so! You wish that I should love my husband out of charity, as you love your wife."

"I did not say *out of* charity, but *with* charity. I have invoked what is purest and grandest, what sanctifies love, and makes marriage something sacred."

"It is well," said Cesarine, all at once cold and calm. "You have judged: I obey."

She went out without permitting me to follow her. "Yes: it is well, Paul," said I to my nephew, embracing him. "You alone have had the courage to trace out her duty for her."

But he gently repulsed my caresses; and, falling upon a sofa, burst into a nervous laugh, intermingled with stifled sobs.

"What is this?" I cried. "What ails you? Are you sick? Are you mad?"

"No, no!" he replied, with a violent effort to become calm. "It is nothing. I — but it is nothing."

"But, indeed, — what is the trouble? Unhappy boy, you love her, then?"

"No, aunt. I do not love her in the sense you attach to the word. She is not my ideal, the object of my life. If she thinks so, undeceive her: she is not even my friend, my sister, my child, like Marguerite. My senses are grossly and foolishly captivated by her beauty, no more. If she wishes to know, tell her, and dispel any delusions from her mind. But, no! tell her nothing; for she would consider herself avenged for my resistance, and she is the woman to rejoice in my torture. It is not so serious a matter as she thinks. Women always exaggerate the wounds which it pleases them to inflict upon us. I am not M. de Rivonnière! I shall not go mad, or die of grief, or even suffer very long. I am a man. Never has the lust of the mind or of the flesh, as they say in the church, carried me away, or affected my reason, my conscience, or my will. The advice which I have just given cost me a struggle, I confess. But I conquered myself; and this dream has vanished, as every other vanity of the brain of a man at twenty-five may be driven off without injury. Say nothing to me, aunt: I am not a hero, still less a martyr. I am a man; and nothing human is foreign to me, as the philosopher has it. Thus prudence, the sentiment of honor, and self-respect are as familiar to me as the emotions of youth. I give the preference to what is right, over what is simply agreeable. 'Duty before pleasure,' always; and, thanks to that maxim, duty is always pleasant. Now let us speak of Marguerite, my good aunt. She affects me, and interests me much more. She is not well; and I am more uneasy every day on her account. It would almost seem that she is concealing something from me; but, what it is, I in vain try to guess. Come and see her some day. I will leave you alone, and you shall try to draw her out. I must go back to her. Can I drink this glass of water? It will serve to bring me back to myself completely."

He took the glass; then, remembering that Cesarine in her agitation had put her lips to it, he replaced it, took another from the sideboard, saying with a half-bitter, half-playful laugh, "I don't need to know her thoughts: indeed, I do know them."

"You think you know her, perhaps."

"I did know her: then I was deceived again. After accusing her too strongly, I justified her too much. But just now, when she asked me, 'Is it you who advise me to be *the* wife of another?' I comprehended her delusion, her task, her aim. I *had* already suspected every thing, from her conduct yesterday towards Marguerite, from her bitter smile, and her insulting words. She is not so strong as she supposes, at least, not stronger

than I. And yet, I repeat, aunt, I am not a hero: I am a man of my time, whom woman shall govern no more, unless by becoming loyal, and loving in earnest. A little more progress, and coquettes, like all other tyrants, will have for adorers only corrupt and effeminate men."

He left me re-assured, so far as he was concerned, but anxious about Cesarine. I did not dare to go and see her; but I asked to see M. Dietrich. He had gone away with her.

Bertrand came an hour later to tell me, in behalf of the marchioness, that M. de Rivonnière was calm, and that she begged me to come at eight o'clock, and pass the evening. I was prompt. I found the marquis melancholy, effusive, and grateful. Cesarine said to me before him, as soon as I entered, 'We didn't invite you to dinner, because nothing is in order. The marquis has given us a very bad dinner, but that isn't his fault. To-morrow Dubois and I shall take the housekeeping in charge, and things will go better. But, in compensation for our bad dinner, we have had a charming ride in the Bois: all Paris was there."

He was so quiet and self-possessed, that I found it difficult not to appear suprised. "Take your work, if you wish," said she. "You never like to remain inactive. My father was just telling us about to-day's session." M. Dietrich continued to talk politics to the marquis, wishing, perhaps, to assure himself of the latter's sanity, but proceeding as though he had no doubt of it. I was convinced that his purpose was a conscientious attempt to cure him. The marquis listened, evidently not without effort; but his replies were apt. From time to time, he manifested some anxiety, as he looked at the clock. The unfortunate man, since he now knew that he was reputed mad, seemed to be conscious of his insanity, and to dread its approach.

He was undoubtedly very much on his guard; for he triumphed over the fatal hour, and reached ten o'clock without once losing his presence of mind, or appearing to be in any pain.

Then he fell into a sort of thoughtful dejection, listened less and less to what was said to him, and at last did not reply at all. "I see you are in pain," said Cesarine to him. "You should go to bed: we will remain here in the drawing-room until you are asleep. Father and I will play chess. If you can't sleep, you can come back."

He answered by a meaningless smile; and no one knew whether he understood. Dubois led him away. M. Dietrich slipped into a room adjoining his son-in-law's bed-chamber. He wished to listen, and observe the phenomena of the attack. Dubois left the doors open.

Cesarine, who remained in the drawing-room with me, went noiselessly by, back and forth. Soon she called me to listen also. The marquis was in frightful suffering, and was complaining to Dubois like a child. The brave servant comforted him, saying patiently, again and again, "This will all pass away, Monsieur: it will soon pass away."

The pain increased: the poor man called for his pistols, and then came nearly an hour of violence, during which he loaded Dubois with insults and reproaches for wishing to preserve his life. But he had not energy enough to be openly rebellious, as his suffering paralyzed his will. All at once, the pain ceased; and he became

demented. He spoke low: we could follow nothing, and understand nothing; but we found that he passed from one subject to another, all of them puerile and silly. We heard better the replies of Dubois, who contradicted him obstinately. He was no longer fearful of irritating the sick man.

"You know very well that there is not a word of truth in what you say," said Dubois. "You are in Paris, and not in Geneva. The jeweller has not deranged your watch to play you a dirty trick. Your watch goes very well; and no jeweller has meddled with it."

We heard the marquis say, "Ah! there it is! you think me mad. That's your idea!"

"No, monsieur," replied the patient old man. "I knew you when you were little: I have, I might say, raised you. You are not mad: you have never been so. But you were always a great joker, and you are now. You used to have a long string of stories to make sport of me; and it is your habit still. Now, I am in the habit of listening to you, and not believing a word you say."

The marquis spoke again, lower; then distinctly and rationally. "My friend," said he, "I feel that my head is all right again, and I am going to sleep; but you must remind me of what I did yesterday, for I remember nothing at all of it."

"I shall not tell you, because then you would not sleep. When one wishes to sleep, one should remember nothing, and think of nothing. Now go to bed. To-morrow you will remember."

"As you will; only something troubles me. Was I very ugly just now?"

"You? never!"

"I didn't abuse you when I was suffering?"

"That you never did, so far as I know."

"You lie, Dubois: I struck you, perhaps?"

"What is in your head? Why do you talk so to-day?"

"Because, it seems to me that I remember a little, at least, as though it were a dream. Dream or not, embrace me, my poor Dubois, and go to bed. I am very well."

Fifteen minutes afterwards, we heard him breathing regularly. He was in deep sleep. Dubois came to find us.

"M. le Marquis is saved," said he. "He does not yet know how much good you have done him; but he shows an improvement. His attack was shorter and less violent than usual. Keep on, and you will see him grow better and better. Grief crushed him; and happiness will cure him, I have no doubt."

M. Dietrich inquired if it was the first time the marquis had a vague consciousness of his violence.

"Yes, monsieur, it is the first time: you see his good heart asserting itself; and how he embraced me, poor child! Just as when he was a little boy!"

It was five o'clock in the morning. Dubois had caused to be prepared for us the room occupied by Mme. de Montherme when she came to Paris after her brother was wounded. She was not aware of his return, and was passing the summer at Rouen, where her husband had business to attend to. We therefore retired, and were able to be present, in a manner, when the marquis awoke, remaining in the room from which we had overheard the affair of the night before. He aroused Dubois at nine o'clock, and, casting himself on his neck, cried, "My friend, I remember all about yesterday. I was cruelly tried. I learned that I was insane, and that my wife was afraid of me. But then she came to me at the

moment when I had coolly resolved to blow out my brains. She was as good as an angel: her father was good too. They treated me like a child, but like a beloved child. They took me, whether I would or no, in their carriage, and rode with me through the most beautiful parts of Paris, to show people that I was indeed cured, to make them believe I was not insane, and that my wife pretended to live with me. That did me both good and evil. I see that she wishes to vindicate my dignity, and that she would relieve me from the embarrassment of my situation. I am glad of this: she acts nobly the part of a wife who will cause the name she bears to be respected. She has done me great good: she has destroyed my jealousy; for, in pretending to live with me, she has given up any other hopes she may have been encouraging. There was but one coward who would share these hopes even in appearance; and the man whom I suspected of loving her, in spite of himself, is a man of courage, and very proud. Every thing is right so far as my wife is concerned, also her father, and that excellent Mlle. de Nermont, who has always given the best of advice."

"Does Monsieur not know that they were here all night, and are here still!"

"What do you say? Oh, misfortune! They have seen me, then, in my madness?"

"No, monsieur: they might have seen you, but you had no attack."

"That is false, Dubois. I have them every night. Valbonne confessed it to me, and I remember. My wife wished to learn the truth; and now she knows all, and can never love me."

Cesarine entered, hearing him sobbing. She found him in his dressing-gown, seated before the mirror, and weeping bitterly. She embraced him, and said, "Your insanity is in believing yourself insane; otherwise you are of sound mind. We were mistaken: you have your reason. That it is slightly unsettled for a few hours at night no longer disquiets me. I undertake to cure you by remaining with you, to console and entertain you, and to prove to you that I have no better or dearer friend than you are."

"Remain, then!" he replied, dropping on his knees at her feet. "Remain, without fear, and cure me! I will yet get well. The man whose wife you have declared yourself, by showing yourself in public with him, must not be insane, and an idiot. I will be as submissive as a child; and my gratitude shall be stronger than my passion, for I will no more forget my vows. What I have sworn to do, I will do. Take care, then, of your friend, your brother, until he shall be worthy to become your protector."

It was to this point that Cesarine wished to lead him. She could take care of the sick better than she could do any thing else; and she entered on the task courageously. She installed herself at her husband's house, and prayed me to remain with her. M. Dietrich returned home, but came to dine with us every day. Bertrand passed the night in watching every thing, always ready to assist in the control of the sick man if he became violent; although Dubois was not weary of his task. In a very few days, the attacks, which had been steadily becoming less violent, disappeared almost entirely; and every thing betokened a speedy and complete cure. Visits were received and returned. A vague rumor of the marquis's insanity had obtained currency. Every appearance, and even the reality, belied the rumor.

XXIV.

I SAW Marguerite quite frequently, and was not so free from anxiety on her account as on that of the marquis. She was steadily growing more ill: wearing away in a slow fever, she had hardly strength to leave her bed. Paul observed with uneasiness the absolute powerlessness of all remedies. After a consultation of physicians, which increased our alarm by leading to no positive opinion of her case, Marguerite saw, notwithstanding all our pains to conceal it, that she was practically given over as incurable. "Listen," she said to me, when we were alone together one day: "I am going to die. I know it, because I feel it. It is time that I should speak while I can. I am going to die, because I ought, because I wish to. I have done very wrong. I trust in you as I would in God. You can repair the wrong, if you think it proper. I intercepted a letter written to Paul. I opened it, and read it; and then hid it. Paul does not know it; but let me tell you, that, when I performed this base act, I had already determined to die, because I had guessed all. Now read."

She handed me a crumpled paper, hot with her fever, and moist with her tears, which she carried in her bosom as if it were a poison which she was voluntarily absorbing. It was in Cesarine's hand, and was dated a fortnight back.

"Paul," she wrote, "you desired it. I am at *his* house. I shall save him: he is already saved. I am lost myself; for, as soon as he is cured, I shall have no more excuse for leaving him, and claiming my liberty. It will be necessary that I shall be his wife. Do you understand? His love is unconquerable, — it is his life; and, if he loses hope once more, he will destroy himself. You desired it: I will be his wife! But know, that, first, I would be yours. You love me, I know; but we must part forever: our duty requires it, and we will not be cowardly. But we must say *adieu* to each other; and we will live one day, which will sum up for us an entire life. I will let you know the day for this supreme farewell; and I will find a pretext for my absence, which can serve for you as well. Do not reply, and betray nothing by your looks."

I read this note over three times. I tried to believe myself the victim of a delusion. I tried to doubt if it was Cesarine's writing; but doubt was impossible. Passion had conquered her: she flung pride and shame to the winds. She fell from the sublime heights to which she had wished to soar, to the lowest and basest of human weaknesses. She regarded herself as debased by the love of her own husband: she wished to render herself guilty first. Strange and deplorable folly, which made me blush for her so that I could not conceal my indignation from Marguerite!

The poor woman did not understand me. "It was very wrong, wasn't it?" said she, hearing my exclamations. "Yes: it was very wrong to intercept such a letter as that. But what could I do? I hadn't the courage that I longed for. I said to myself, 'Then I am going to die! He loves her: she says so. He deceives me by his virtue and his kindness; but he loves her: that is very certain. If he didn't tell her so, she saw it; and so have I. Poor Paul! How unhappy he has been on my account! how he has struggled against it! how grand and generous he has been! I have done wrong to keep him out of happiness. It would be better

for him that I had not lived. I have lived too long. Every day I remain, it seems to me, I am robbing him. Ah! I have been cowardly. I ought to have said to him, 'Give me a few weeks yet to look at my poor child, for I would not like to forget him when I am dead! Then go to the meeting with her. It will not be the last. You love each other so much, that you will not be conscious of wrong in loving; only don't tell me any thing. Let me believe that perhaps you will not go. Pardon me for having been your burden, your jailer, your punishment; but know that I have loved you more than she ever did, for I am going to die that you may have her love; and she would never have done that for you.'"

She spoke in this strain for a long time, with excitement, and almost eloquently. I did not interrupt her, for meanwhile Paul had noiselessly entered. He remained behind the bed-curtain, and listened attentively. He desired to know all; and she, on her part, confessed all. "You will justify me when I am gone," she said. "Let him know that it was not my fault I did not die sooner. I did my best to have it all over as soon as possible. I took all the medicine they gave me into my mouth, but I never swallowed it unless they compelled me by watching me. In the night, when the watchers slept for a moment, I sat up in bed, so as to take cold. If I was told to take opium, I took too much. I tried every thing that could make me sicker. I pretended to be able to sleep only by lying on my stomach, and smothered my heart until I lost consciousness. I wanted to try every way to put myself to death!"

"Enough, Marguerite," said Paul, showing himself. "I know enough to save your life, and I will save it: you will desire it, and we shall be happy. We will forget all that we have suffered. Show me the letter you were speaking about, and don't be afraid."

He gently took the letter, read it without emotion, cast it on the ground, and trod upon it. "That is an infamous letter!" he exclaimed. "It is an insult to my honor! What! I hold out my hand to her husband after the duel, accept his apologies, pardon him in his repentance, advise his marriage, and the reconciliation after marriage, all to deceive him, to get possession of his wife before himself, and abase myself in his opinion more than he abased himself in mine by his conduct towards you? Why, this woman is more insane than he, and her madness has nothing noble in it. It is the madness of a sick conscience, a false soul, a bad heart. I ought to hate her, for her object is not even blind passion. She hopes to punish me for the harsh advice I gave her, by forcing into my life what she thinks would become a piercing, eternal regret. Well, let me tell you what I would have done to such a woman if neither Jacques de Rivonnière, nor my aunt, nor you had ever existed. I would have gone to her rendezvous, and would have said to her on parting, 'Thanks, madame: to-morrow it will be the turn of some one else. I leave you without regret.' But to suppose that I would have an hour of intoxicating happiness with her at the price of my honor and your life! Ah, Marguerite, my poor dear child, you do not know me yet! Come, you shall know me. Meanwhile swear to me that you will get well, that you will live! Look at me! Do you not see in my eyes that you are, with my Pierre, the dearest things I have on earth?" He went to get the boy, and placed him in his mother's arms. "Look at

the treasure you have given me. Tell me if I cannot love the mother of that boy. Tell me if I can live without her. Let us suppose the worst. Suppose I have had a fancy for that foolish woman, whom you admired so much more than I, — would it be a great sacrifice to make for you, to reject that fancy as a foul and wicked thing? Would it require enormous courage to prefer to her my domestic happiness, and the noble devotion of a heart which would *smother* itself, as you say, out of love for me? No, no! do not smother it, — that noble heart which belongs to me! Suppose all that you will, Marguerite: admit that I am a fool, a vain dupe, a corrupt libertine, a traitor, — though I did not think I deserved such a supposition; but at least do not suppose that in seeing you long for death I would accept the shameful *happiness* which you would leave in my reach. Come, come!" said he, seeing a smile returning to her colorless lips, "arouse yourself from sickness and death, my poor wife, — my only, my true wife! Laugh with me at those, who, while pretending to be no one's, will fall perhaps to the baseness of being any one's. These strong characters are phantoms. The greatness to which they pretend is but dust. They crumble before the look of a sensible man. Let the beautiful marchioness become what she will, I will undertake no more to direct her mind. I even abdicate my position as her disinterested friend, which she imposed upon me. I will not reply to her: I will not see her. I give you here and now my word upon it, as seriously, as truthfully, as if I were for the second time joining myself to you in marriage. And I swear also that I am proud and happy in making this promise."

A week later, Marguerite, acquiescing in the commands of the doctor, and with a mind put forever at rest, was out of danger. Plans of travelling, in which my company was counted upon, were discussed: for my heart was no longer with Cesarine; it was with Paul and Marguerite. I made no reproach to Cesarine in regard to her conduct, and did not announce to her my intention of leaving her. That would have led to a conversation too excited and angry; and, after having loved her so much, I did not feel that I had courage for such a scene. She continued her care for her husband, assiduously and well. He was intoxicated with gratitude and hope. She was put forward as a model for all wives. She was making up for the heedless folly and excessive independence of her youth, by a submission to duty, and by serious efforts to do good, which brought her in so much the more reputation. She was arranging every thing to go and pass the autumn with her husband in the country.

Two evenings before the day fixed for the departure she wrote to Paul, "Be at your office at seven o'clock in the morning. I will come to take you." Paul showed me this note with a shrug of the shoulders, begged me to say nothing to Marguerite, and burned it, as he had burned the former note. I saw that he was a little nervous, that was all. He did not leave the house next day.

Fearing that Cesarine, deceived, and furious in consequence, could not restrain her passion, I undertook to watch her, wishing to render her that last service of preventing her from betraying herself. She went out at seven, and did not return until nine. Then she came in, but went away again, and came back at noon. She was intending to go to Latour's again,

after having breakfasted with her father; but I stopped her by saying, casually, that I was going to my nephew's, to see him.

"Is he very sick?" she cried, forgetting herself.

"He is not sick at all," I answered.

"I spoke to him about my book, and have written to him twice. Why didn't he answer? I would like to know, and I will go with you to see him."

"No," said I, "because there is nothing to be arranged about your book. He received both your letters, and did not wish to answer them. He burned them."

"And he showed them to you?"

"Yes."

"Also to Marguerite?"

"No."

"Is that all you have to tell me?"

"That is all."

"He wishes to quarrel with me, then. He has condemned me to blush before you! He believes that I will bear your censure!"

"You are not called upon to bear it. I am going to live with my relatives."

"It is well," said she, in a hard, dry tone, and went and shut herself in her room, from which she did not re-appear until evening.

I made my final preparations, and said good-by to M. Dietrich without allowing him to suspect any thing unusual. I took for a pretext a necessary absence of several months to complete the cure of my niece. We were at the Dietrich residence, where Cesarine had told her husband she intended to pass the day in order to prepare for her departure on the morrow. She left all the care of preparation to her Aunt Helmina; and after having been shut up in her room all the afternoon, under pretence of fatigue, came down to dine with us. She had wept so much, that it was betrayed by her looks; and her father seemed anxious. She laid it all to the sorrow which she experienced in taking leave of the family mansion, and loaded us both with her tenderest caresses.

The next day, she set off alone with her husband; and I went to live in the Rue de Vaugirard. As I was leaving the Dietrich house, I was surprised to meet Bertrand, who saluted me with a ceremonious air.

"How?" said I. "Didn't you go with the marchioness?"

"No, mademoiselle," he replied: "I took leave of her this morning."

"Is it possible? Why?"

"Because she made me carry, day before yesterday, a letter which I did not approve."

"You know its contents, then?"

"Without opening it, which Mademoiselle will certainly not suppose I did, I could not know its contents. But from the manner in which M. Paul received it, and said in a short way that there was no answer, and from the persistency with which Madame la Marquise tried to find him yesterday at his office, from her mortification, and her anger, I saw, that, for the first time in her life, she had done an unworthy act, and that her confidence in me was beginning to degrade me. I asked to be discharged; but she refused, not supposing that a man so devoted as I have been to her could resist her. I insisted; which offended her very much. She taxed me with ingratitude; and I was forced to tell her that my discretion would prove to her my gratitude. Then she spoke more gently; but I was offended, and accordingly refused any increase of wages, and every other benefit she offered me."

I approved what he had done, and

entered my carriage, my heart full at seeing Cesarine so humiliated; but the tender greeting of my children effaced my sadness. We passed the summer at Vichy and in Auvergne, whence we brought back Marguerite completely cured, happy, and radiant with beauty, and little Pierre more robust and active than ever. I might state from my own observation, that Paul was happy, and that he thought of Cesarine only as he would of a romance, read with emotion, occupying a day of excitement, but coldly criticized on the morrow.

As for the beautiful marchioness, she re-appeared in society with great brilliancy the following winter. Her extravagance, her beauty, her wit, her parties, were the talk of the town. She was the most charming of women, and at the same time a woman of the first rank for goodness and intelligence. We alone, in our little tranquil corner, knew the vulnerable spot in that stout armor; but we said nothing about it outside, and talked on the subject very little among ourselves. Marguerite, notwithstanding her husband's severe opinion regarding this idol of hers, was always ready to defend and admire her. She could not forget that she owed the life of her son to "her beautiful marchioness." Paul did not interfere with this, a part of the religion of a tender and generous soul. As for myself, the absence of hate in her jealousy made me love Marguerite, and convinced me that it was not an idle boast, when she said, that, if she was the most simple and ignorant of us all, she was the most loving and devoted.

XXV.

I HAVE enjoyed relating this family history in my leisure moments. And what will be Cesarine's future? Her father and husband, whom I see sometimes, and who have made several vain efforts to draw me back to them, seem as kind as possible. She alone remains cold and distant, and has not made the slightest effort to restore our former footing of friendship. Perhaps she will change her mind by and by; but I do not desire it. The seven years which I passed with her were, if not the most painful, at least the most agitated of all my life.

For two years Paul has seen her but once; and this is the way he described the fortuitous meeting to me:—

"Yesterday, as I was at Fontainebleau on business, I made up my mind to take the opportunity to walk as far as the rocks of Avon. Returning by the wooded path along the Moret Road, wholly absorbed in my thoughts, I did not hear the approach of two horses, coming behind me in the sand. One of them literally ran me down, and would have thrown me over, if I had not, by a quick movement, caught hold of, and clung to his bridle. The noble brute, a magnificent animal by the way, did not want to trample upon me. He stopped of himself, when a vigorous blow of the whip from the intrepid amazon who was on his back made him rear, and brought his knees against my breast. I was not hurt, for I had time to leap to one side, still clinging to the bridle. 'Let me pass now, Monsieur Gilbert!' exclaimed a well-known voice, with a slightly disdainful accent. 'Pass, Madame la Marquise,' I replied coldly, with a bow which she did not return. She passed on like a flash of lightning, followed by her groom, leaving slightly in the rear the cavalier who accompanied her, and who was no other than the Viscount de Valbonne.

"He stopped, and stretched out his

hand. 'What!' he cried, 'is it you? I was hurrying to prevent you from being thrown down; for I saw a heedless pedestrian, who was not avoiding the most heedless equestrienne in the world. Do you know that a little more, and she would have run over you?'

"'I do not let myself be run over,' I replied. 'It is not to my liking.'

"'Alas!' he replied, 'neither is it to mine. Good-by, my dear friend: I cannot let the marchioness return to the city alone.'

"And he went like the wind to rejoin her. I know all now."

"What! What do you know, my child?"

"I know that the poor viscount, rude as he is in manners and language, has taken my place as target for the eyes of the imperious Cesarine; that he has been less fortunate than I, and that she has *run over* him! I saw all that in his look, his accent, his few words, spoken with deep bitterness of spirit. She has made him expiate his hostility to her by a servitude which may last as long as that of the marquis; that is, for life. Rivonnière is happy enough. He thinks himself beloved; the world thinks so too. Valbonne is to be pitied. He betrays his friend; he is humiliated. He will perhaps come to a violent end, for he is a dark and mystical nature.

"Do you know, aunt," added Paul, "that that woman was near doing me a great injury? I can tell you so now. I was more smitten by her than I have ever confessed to you. I never betrayed it in her presence; but she saw it in spite of me; and that will explain to you the audacity of her avowals, and makes them, I will not say less culpable, but less impudent. Where should I be if I had not possessed a little moral courage? Did she not place me on the brink of a precipice? If I was near losing my poor wife, was it not because, dazed and bewildered, I lacked penetration, and ignored the extent of her grief? No one is ever strong, believe me. Reproach me no more for my austerity to myself. If Marguerite had not been sublime in her madness, I should have been lost. I was letting her die, without seeing what was killing her. She had reason to be jealous. I had need to be impenetrable and unconquerable; for her heart, powerful by instinct, felt the giddiness of mine.

"All this is past, but not forgotten. The beautiful marchioness would have been very well pleased yesterday to see me roll ridiculously in the dust under her horse's feet. And I remember to say to myself every day, 'Never let your conscience be led astray by a hair's breadth.'"

To-day, the 5th August, 1866, Paul is the happy father of a little girl, as beautiful as her brother. M. Dietrich desired to be her godfather. Cesarine did not oppose, and so we guess that she was willing.

I may finish a story not about myself, by a few words personal. I have not lived so long a time, wholly engaged in looking out for others, without learning some useful lessons. I have made my mistakes too, and I confess them. The chief of these was in being sceptical for so long of the progress of which Marguerite was capable. Perhaps I had prejudices, which, in spite of myself, are attributable to a class of prejudices of birth or education. Thanks to the admirable character of Paul, Marguerite has become a lady so charming and so sociable, that I need no urging to call her my niece, and treat her as my daughter. The care of their children is my most pleas-

ant duty. I have replaced in that duty Madame Feron, whom we have placed in comparatively easy circumstances. As for ourselves, we find that we have enough for our few wants. We have contributed our little incomes to a common fund. I am giving a few lessons in the primary branches to some children. Paul's business prospers. Perhaps some day he will be richer than he expects to be now. It must be, as a necessary result of his orderly mind, his intelligence, and his activity; but we do not desire wealth, and, so far from urging him to seek it, we require him to take leisure, which we try to make pleasant to him.

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